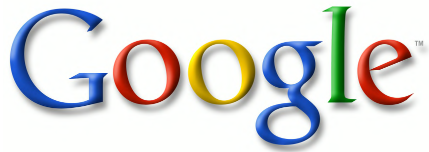

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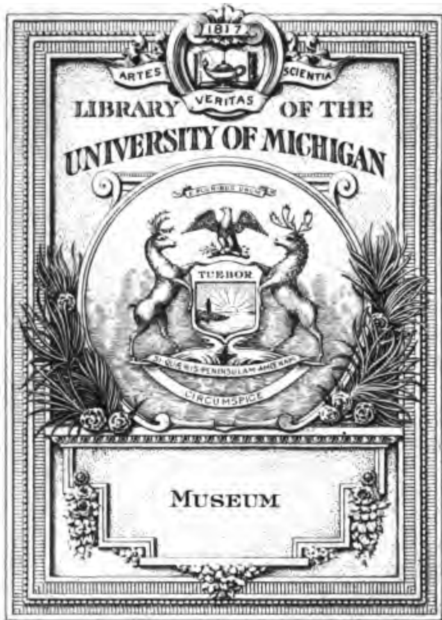
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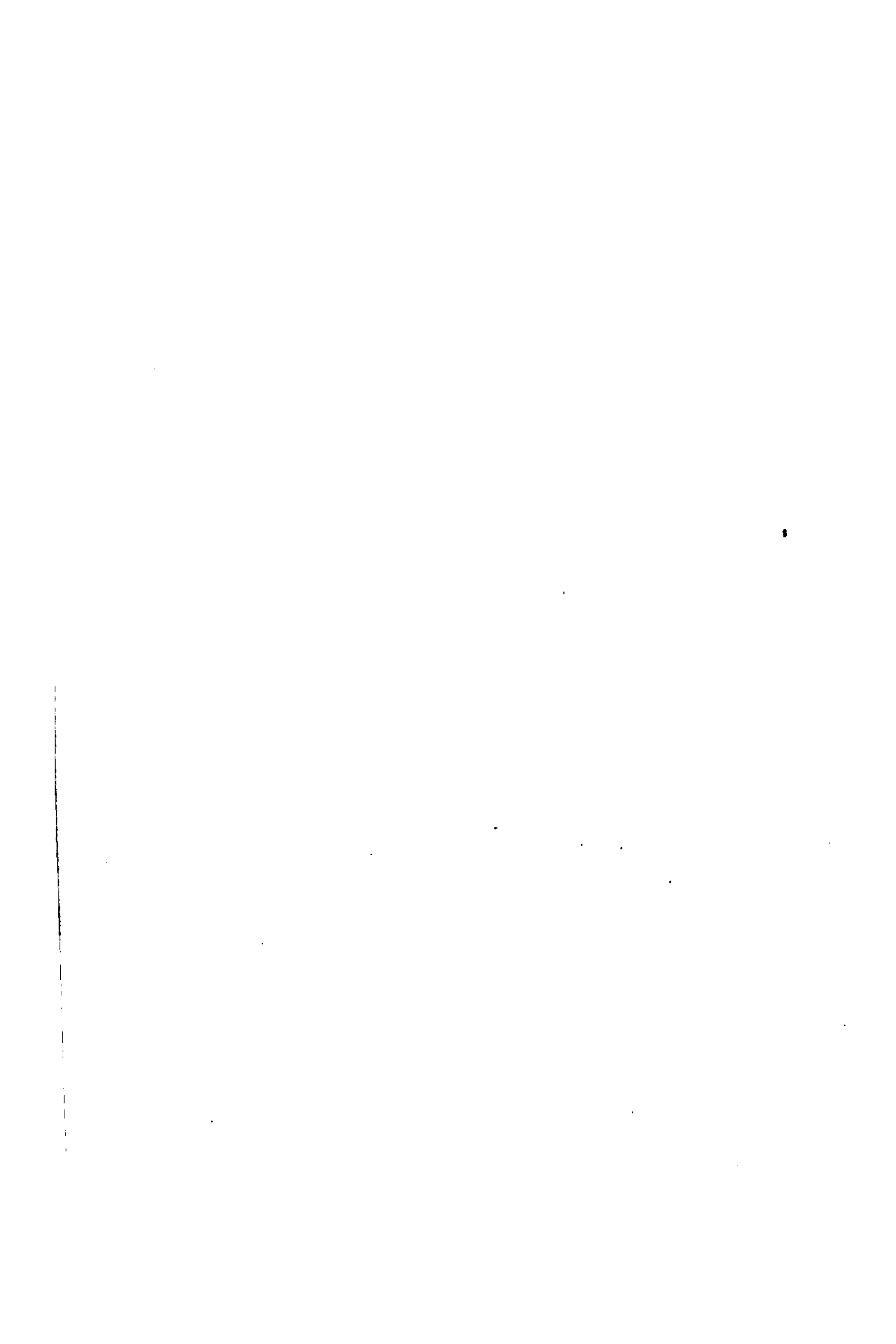

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Your song, your forms, your rhythmic flight,
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To man as to a lubber friend.
And, generous, teach his awkward race
Courage, and probity and grace!

EMERSON.

Miller, Mrs. Harriet (Mann)

WITH THE BIRDS IN MAINE

BY

OLIVE THORNE MILLER

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
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1904

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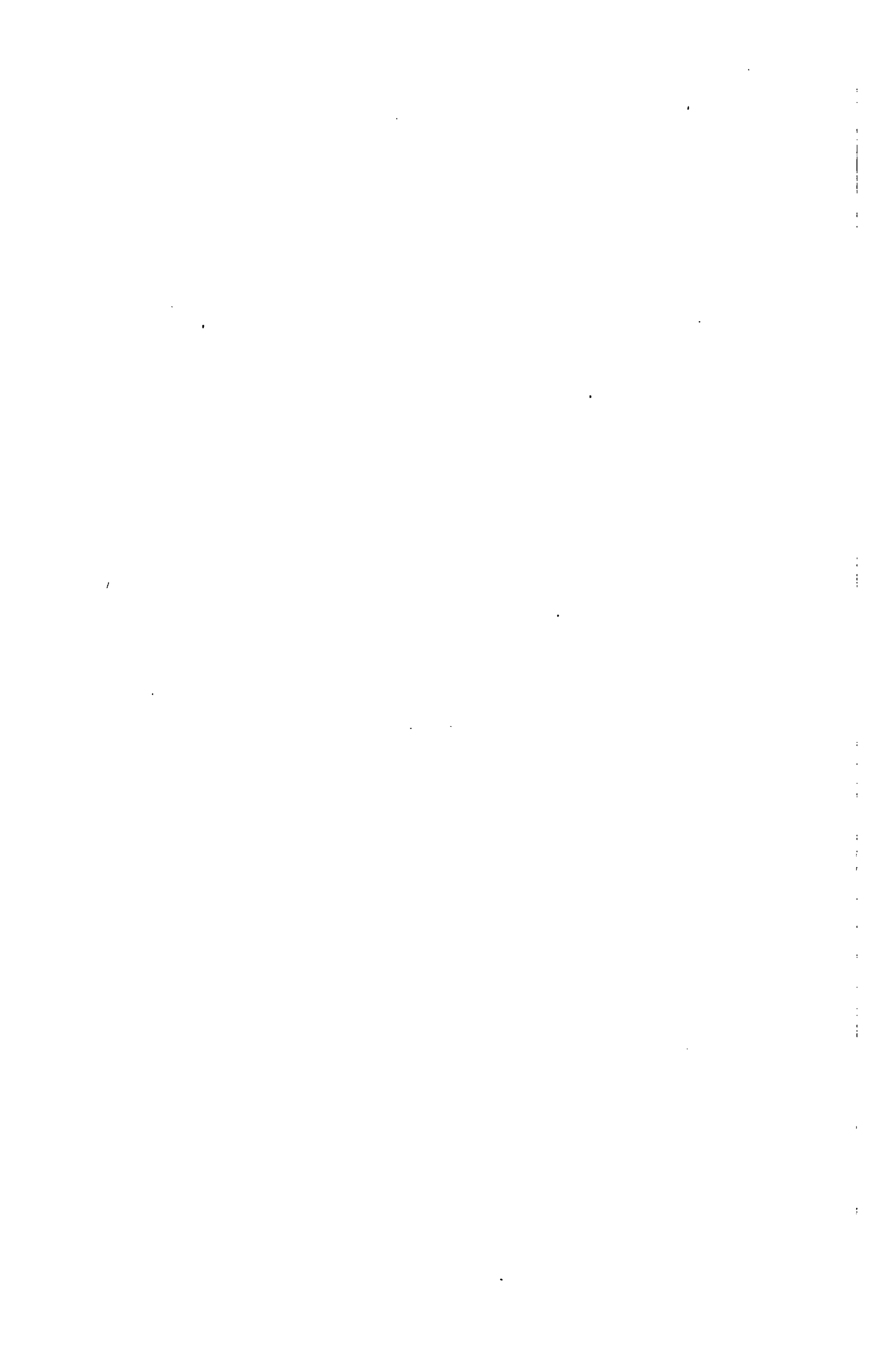
PREFACE

ALTHOUGH the studies chronicled in this book, with one or two exceptions, were made in Maine during ten summers, part or all of which I have spent there, it should be understood that the birds described are not confined to the Pine Tree State nor even to New England. They are for the most part common to the Eastern and Middle States.

Thanks are due to "Our Animal Friends" for permission to use the chapter "The Comical Chebec."

OLIVE THORNE MILLER.



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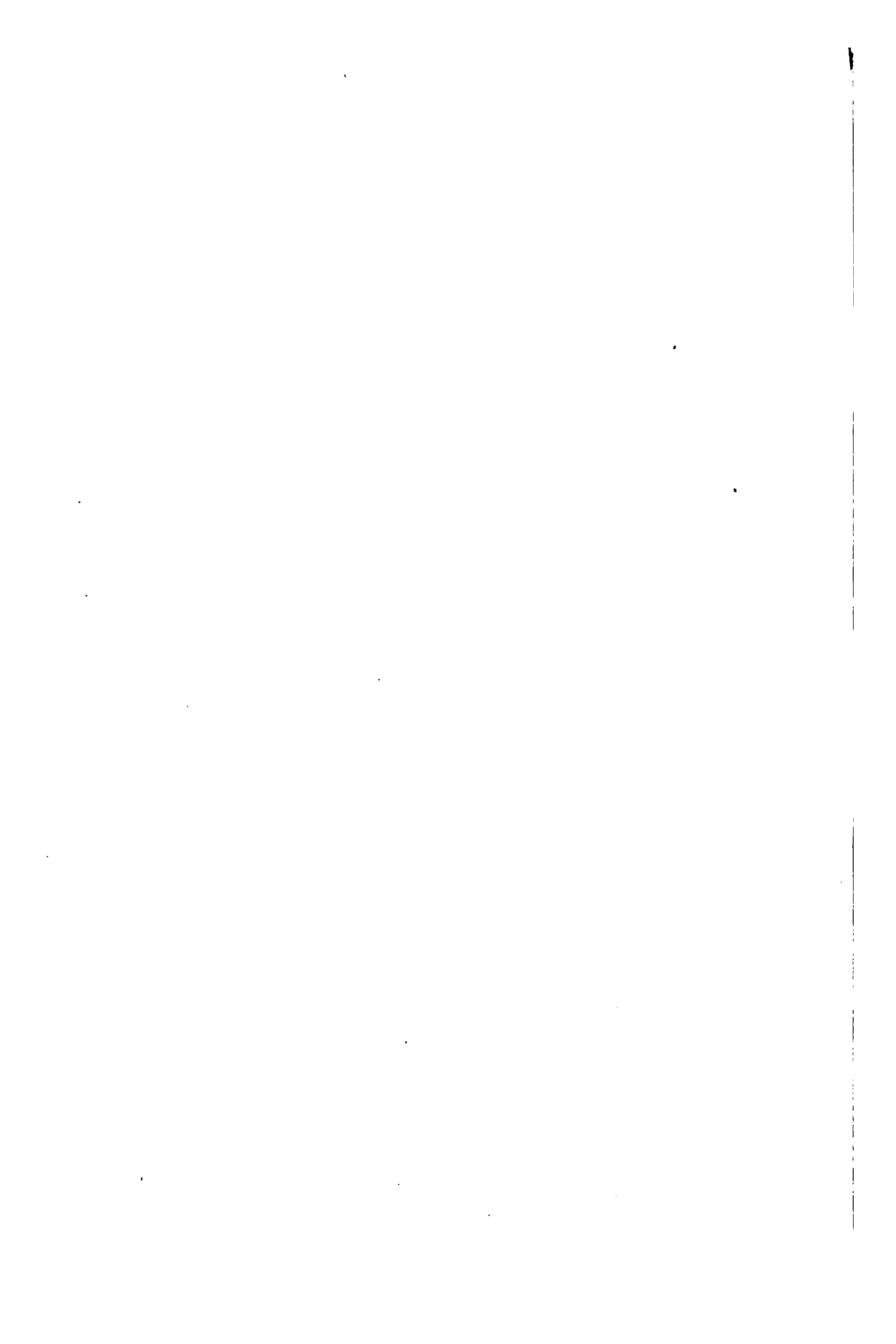


ON THE COAST OF MAINE

On the coast of Maine, where many green islands and salt inlets fringe the deep-cut shore-line ; where balsam firs and bayberry bushes send their fragrance far seaward, and song-sparrows sing all day, . . . on the lonely coast of Maine stood a small gray house facing the morning light.

Sarah Orne Jewett.

WITH THE BIRDS IN MAINE

I

ON THE COAST OF MAINE

On an outlying island on the lonely — but lovely — coast of Maine so faithfully pictured by Miss Jewett on the preceding page, some of the happiest summers of my life have been passed, hours slipping into days, and days running on into weeks, almost unheeded, while

> "Dreaming sweet idle dreams of having strayed
> To Arcady with all its golden lore"; —

not, however, in studying the human life of its storm-beaten cottages, interesting as that may be, but in watching life's tragedies and comedies among our little neighbors of the fields and woods — the dramas of the tree-tops.

My abiding-place at the time my story begins differed materially from the pictur-

esque "small gray house facing the morning light," being a modern structure which offered the rare combination of a comfortable home in the edge of an undisturbed forest, completely secluded from roads and their traffic, yet within two minutes' reach of the common way to the village. The outlook from my window was into the tops of tall spruces and firs, relieved here and there by a pine, a birch, or a maple. Through a vista, and over the tops of more distant trees, could be seen the broad Atlantic Ocean, and above all

> "The blue arch of sky
> Where clouds go sailing by."

The feathered neighbors had evidently accepted the house as a part of the woods, for they came freely about, delighting especially in a worn and battered old spruce within fifteen feet of the window. On this tree, — which doubtless furnished a choice assortment of bird dainties, — first or last, appeared all the birds of the vicinity.

As usual, the bird-life possessed a character of its own, and it impressed me as a particularly refined neighborhood. No vulgar, squawking English sparrow disturbed its

peace, no chippies squabbled in the grass, no tireless red-eyed vireo fretted the air with its endless iteration, and — what was not half so pleasing — no catbirds, orioles, bluebirds, goldfinches, or flycatchers could be numbered among the residents.

Juncoes and chickadees scrambled and frolicked over the old spruce, white-throated sparrows — the aristocrats of the family — chanted their solemn hymn from the underbrush one side; thrushes sang and called from the tall trees at the back, and it was above all the resort of warblers, the chosen home of these dainty small birds.

I had spent one summer in this retreat, and on arriving there the next time I anticipated no more than renewed acquaintance with my old neighbors. But a rare surprise awaited me. Others of the feathered tribes had discovered the charms of the spot, and were in possession when I reached it.

At dawn the first morning, listening as usual for the familiar songs of the morning, the recitative of the olive-back, the far-off hymn of the hermit, and the hearty little strains of the miscalled warblers, suddenly

the air seemed filled with strange sounds. They appeared to come from all points at once, most of them sharp "pip! pip's!" like the cry of a lost chicken, with others, indescribable and most confusing, and all loud, emphatic, and utterly strange to me.

Here was an extraordinary visitation! I sprang up and rushed to the window. There they were, the whole jolly crowd, on a tall balsam-fir close by, a dozen or more, scrambling about the branches with a thousand antics and shouts of glee.

Such a merry party I never saw. The greater number wore dresses of olive-green, but some in dull red gave me a hint of their identity, and the crossed bills of all confirmed it. They were crossbills, whose strange utterances Longfellow felicitously characterizes as

"Songs like legends strange to hear."

This was treasure-trove indeed, for crossbills are the most erratic of the feathered race in our part of the world, the Bohemians of the bird-world and the despair of the systematist. Wandering about at their own sweet will; having no fixed home that is

known, and no stated dates for traveling; coming no one knows whence, and going no one knows whither; one season making glad the bird-student in one place and the next driving him to despair by their absence, they totally defy classification and exasperate the classifier.

The opinions of man did not, however, dampen the boisterous spirits of my new neighbors, to whom I gave my days and almost my nights from that moment. They were the most joyous of feathered creatures, noisy and talkative, clambering over the trees like a party of parrots, all chattering at once, voluble as a flock of chimney swifts, or a squad of school-children just released, and then suddenly — on a loud call from one of their number — starting off, bounding over the tree-tops in a sort of mad frenzy, all shouting at the top of their voices, leaving the baffled student to guess what it all meant.

A mysterious performance of these birds was a sort of medley. It was executed by a small flock settled together in one tree, all uttering the call which I have called the

"lost-chicken" note, with utmost apparent agitation, and each individual in a different key, thus producing a strange, weird effect.

The crossbills were the most restless, as well as the most noisy of birds, appearing before my window a dozen times a day, sometimes staying but a few minutes, sometimes perhaps half an hour, biting off the cones, holding them under one foot, and extracting the seeds in eager haste as if they had but a minute to stay, and something terrible or important was about to take place.

The morning song to which they treated me about four o'clock was most droll. As nearly as it can be represented by syllables it was like this: —

"Pip! pip! pip! [many times] pap! pap! pap! [many times] kid-dr-r-r! kid-dr-r-r! [with rolling r] qu! qu! pt! pt! pt — e!" and so on in various combinations, all in labored manner, as if it were hard work.

This party were in all stages of plumage, for it appears that in spite of their vagaries, they are obliged to conform to the ordinary bird-habit in moulting. The young still calling for food — and getting it as I saw

once or twice — in their peculiar youthful dress, the mothers of the flock in their usual olive-green, and the singers in all shades of red, from one mottled-all-over red and olive, to the full-dressed and brilliant personage of clear red with dark trimmings.

The most charming exhibition of crossbill eccentricities that I heard was a whisper-song. The bird came alone to the old spruce before my windows, and settled himself on a dead branch in the middle of the tree, where he was hidden from everybody except the spectator behind the blind, of whom he had no suspicion. In a moment he began a genuine whisper-song so low that I could scarcely hear it, near as I was and perfectly silent. He poured forth the whole crossbill repertoire, — all the various utterances I had heard during the weeks I had been studying them, — and all under his breath, with beak nearly closed. Thus softly rendered it was really charming. This enchanting exhibition of crossbill possibilities lasted fully fifteen minutes.

A favorite walk that summer was down to the shore, through a rustic road and a beauti-

ful grove of very tall trees, which differed from every other bit of woods in the vicinity in having no undergrowth whatever. Sundry outcropping rocks and roadside banks made convenient seats for resting-places, and down this road I passed nearly every day.

One evening while lingering upon one of the rocky seats, as was my habit, I was startled by a new song, a wonderful, trilling strain, entirely unfamiliar to me, though I thought I knew all the birds of the vicinity. I started up, eager to see the singer, but the most careful search was fruitless. By the sound I knew that the bird moved about, but I could not get a glimpse of him, and I went home greatly disturbed.

Although the voice of the unknown was of a different quality, the song resembled that of a canary in being long-continued, not in short clauses like a robin song. There were long bewitching tremolos varied by a rapturous "sweet! sweet!" and now and then a slurred couplet of thrilling effect, or a long-drawn single note of rich musical quality, or again a rapid succession of sharp staccato notes. Altogether it was enchanting, and it

put me into a frenzy of excitement. What marvelous singer was this who had escaped the notoriety of the books! for I could find not the smallest record of this song.

After a night of puzzling and consulting of books I started again down the shore-road immediately after breakfast. I could not wait till the usual hour. The mysterious singer was still there; but after trying in vain to see him in the top branches of the tall old trees, which grew together and formed a close roof over the whole grove, I was forced to give it up and go home in despair.

I tried to comfort myself with the wise man's prophecy of the advantage of waiting, and at last his wisdom was proved. Sitting disconsolate on the piazza where I had paused a few minutes before going to my room, suddenly the song burst out close by. It was as if the long-sought singer had followed me home. Almost holding my breath, not to startle him, I crept softly to the end where I could see into the woods, and behold, at the top of the tall pointed fir, beloved of all the birds for a singing-stand — a crossbill, reeling off the trills and quavers with the great-

est ease and enthusiasm. While he sang, a second came and the first one flew, trilling as he went. I saw both of them clearly, and the white on the wings proclaimed them white-winged crossbills, closely related to the American crossbills I had been studying.

The song was so ecstatic it seemed it must belong to courtship days, yet it was then near the end of July, another eccentricity of the family. It could not be doubted that it was an overflowing flood of joy, — a joy which overwhelmed the listener, spell-bound as long as it lasted. Yet the most the books say of this remarkable performance is "the white-winged is said to be a fine singer" (or words to that effect).

After that morning the white-wings came about frequently, mixing freely with the others, and I learned to know them well. Not only did they differ from their American cousins in song, but in every note they uttered, even in the tone of voice. The call-note was a plaintive "peet! peet!" resembling that of the sandpiper, —

"Calling clear and sweet from cove to cove"; —

and like all other birds that I have studied there was great variety and many degrees of excellence in their songs.

The habits of the white-wings were in general the same as those of the American, but they indulged in one eccentricity I could never explain. They paid mysterious visits to the shore, going down in little parties far out of my sight among the rocks, and staying a half hour at a time. There was no beach on which food might be found, and they did not select low tide for the excursions. Neither did it seem to be bathing which attracted them, for there was never any appearance of dressing plumage, and when I started them up in my efforts to see what they were doing they were always ready to fly, and never one was in the water or appeared to have been bathing.

Another favorite retreat of that July was a nook near the house, yet apparently undiscovered by people, and as secluded as if it had been miles away. It was merely a hollow like a little valley among the rocks, perhaps ten feet in extent, inclosed and sheltered by close-growing spruce and maple

trees, and exquisitely carpeted with thick light-green moss mixed with several varieties of dark moss. On this as a foundation were beautiful growing things, bunchberry, now gorgeous in clustered scarlet berries sitting on their four green leaves like queens on a throne; blueberry bushes which had attained only four or five inches in height, but bravely held aloft their tiny blossoms, promise of rich blue fruit; wintergreens with tender green leaves; in one corner a patch of partridge-berry vines loaded with lovely, fragrant bloom, and not the least attractive, some fine grasses, graceful, airy things, beautiful as flowers, holding their minute seed-cups like purple gems shining in the morning sun.

Other growths there were of different shapes and colors to me unknown, but all looked so peaceful, so happy, each little plant coming up out of the ground where Nature had placed it, doing its little best in the spot, making itself as lovely as possible, putting out its perfect blossoms and never dreaming of being discontented with its lot. It was a bit of fairyland. One could easily

imagine the "little people" at home in such a nook, and it held a salutary lesson, too, for restless and dissatisfied mortals, if one had eyes to see.

In this nook were passed many perfect morning hours, when, though not a breath stirred the leaves, it was delightfully cool and fresh, as if the whole earth were newly created. Not a soul was in sight, the whole green world was mine alone. I felt myself "akin to everything that grows," — akin to the dear birds shouting their morning hymns, to the dear "man-bodied trees," to the contented little plants, — I realized how truly we are all one, down to the grass under our heedless feet.

One morning I was passing through an unfrequented path in the woods, when, hearing crossbill song quite near, I looked about for the singers. There on one side, in a little pool left by a recent rain, were two of the family at their bath, singing as usual. For these birds are so full of joy they sing when they eat, when they play, when they watch me, and as I now saw, when they bathe. They were plainly the young of the year,

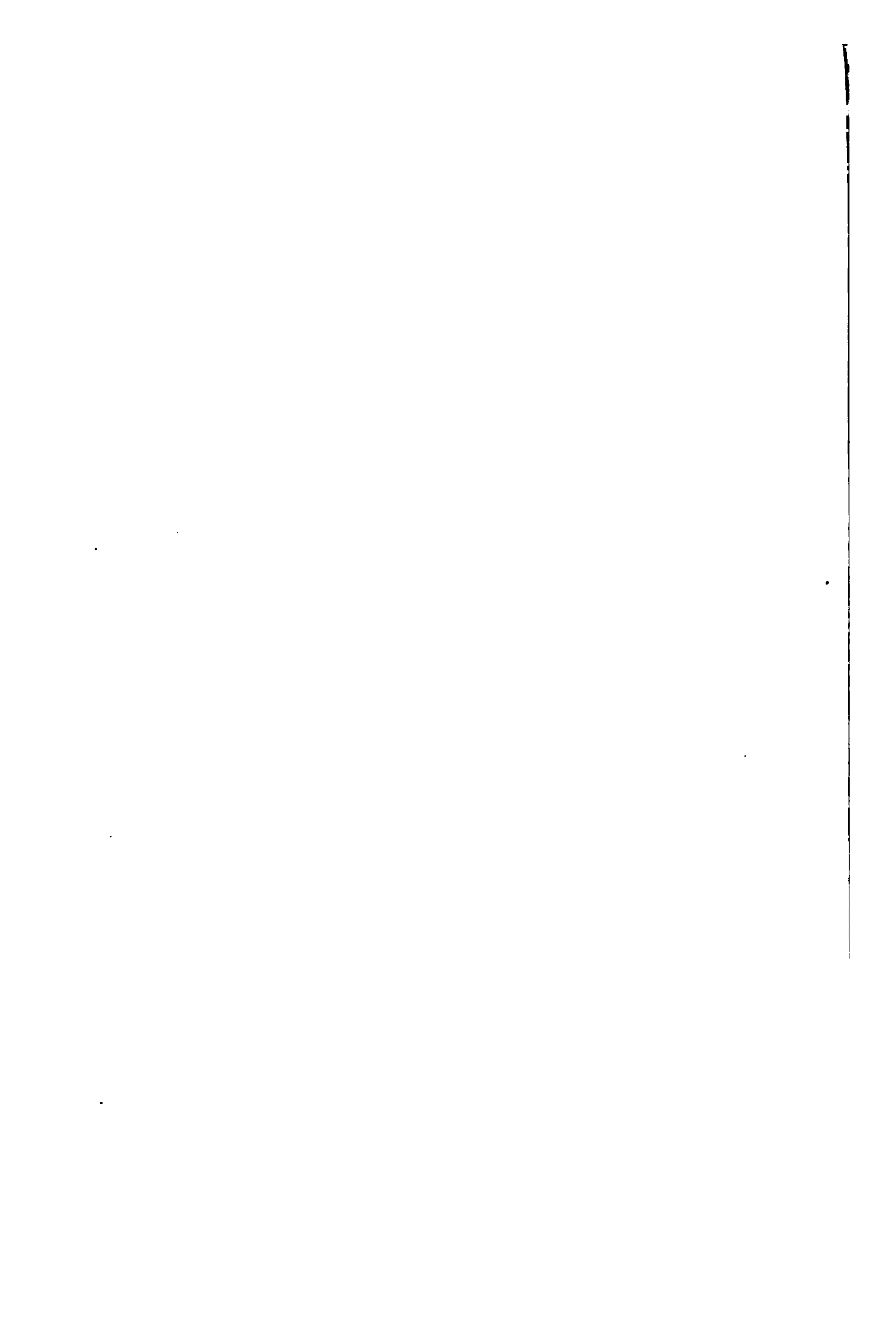
and, since they did not notice me, I had a close look at them. They were streaked all over on back and breast with fine streaks of dark brown on a yellowish-drab ground, the broad white bands on the wings proclaiming their identity.

Crossbills continued to sing till August was nearly over.

Into these halcyon days on that Island on the Coast of Maine burst August, and the "summer crowd." The two or three hotels, empty heretofore and unobtrusive, blossomed out with human life; fancy "turnouts" raised clouds of dust on my evening walk; baby-carriages with attendant white-capped genii desecrated my favorite wood; bicycle-bells haunted the solitary foot-path; boys swarmed on the sandpiper shore; lonely by-ways became common thoroughfares; flowers were ruthlessly destroyed; bird-voices were lost amid the din with which we surround ourselves. The woods seemed to shrink into themselves. The birds retired to fastnesses where human feet could not follow. Solitude was banished, and everywhere were curious, staring eyes. Man, the destroyer, had taken

possession, and it was time for the solitude-loving bird-student to take her departure, for this intrusion of the bustling world effectually

"Put her sweet summer dreams to rout."



UPON THE WOOD ROAD

THE gods talk in the breath of the woods,
They talk in the shaken pine.

EMERSON.

II

UPON THE WOOD ROAD

The way to the woods on this Island was by an old road that wound around between the rocks to the top of the ledge, so long unused that it was given over to grass and flowers. Tall feathery meadow-rue peeped out from the bushy growth of alders on one side; white-faced daisies, and buttercups with "tiny polished urns held up," waved over the old wheel-track; while wild roses perfumed the air, and a little farther in, —

> "Beneath dim aisles, in odorous beds,
> The slight Linnæa hung its twin-born heads."

The woods into which the stony way plunged the moment it left the main road were Nature's own. She had sown her spruces and pines and birches on a bit of the earth almost impassable to man. A jumble of rocks piled in dire confusion, presenting sharp edges at every possible angle, or covered inches deep with soft moss yielding to

the feet like a cushion, and all extremely slippery from the fallen spruce-leaves of many years; trees growing wherever they could secure foothold; dead hanging branches and prostrate trunks bristling with jagged points, — the whole impenetrable except to wings. It was one of Nature's inimitable wild gardens, —

> "An unkempt zone
> Where vines and weeds and spruce-trees intertwine,
> Safe from the plough."

Thanks to the difficulties with which it was surrounded and the little temptation it offered for clearing, it was absolutely untouched by man, excepting here and there in a more practicable spot, where he had made a small inroad. It was a paradise for birds and bird-lovers, though the latter were obliged to content themselves with what they could see on the edge and by looking in.

Up that delectable path was my morning walk. Along its rugged sides certain approximately level rocks made resting-places on which to pause and look about. The first halt was under a low cedar-tree and in a warbler neighborhood. As soon as I became

quiet my ears were assailed by faint notes almost like insect sounds, "pip" or "tic," sometimes whispered "smacks" or squeals, and I watched eagerly for a stirring leaf or a vibrating twig. Many times I was not able, with my best efforts, to see the least movement, for spruce-boughs respond but slightly to the light touch of these tiny creatures. But usually silence and absolute quiet had their reward. Here I saw the magnolia warbler in his gorgeous dress of black and gold, calling an anxious "Davy-Davy! which is it?" and bustling about after a restless youngster the size of a walnut, with the nestling's down still clinging to his head; and more rarely the yellow warbler looking like a brilliant new blossom among the dark old spruces, or dropping like a yellow leaf to the ground.

Into a low tree across the pathway came often the black-and-white creeper, tiptoeing his way up the trunk and uttering his sibilant "ziz-zle, ziz-zle."

On one side appeared once or twice a redstart prancing over the ground in his peculiar "showing-off" manner, and in his bril-

liant orange and black looking as much out of place in the simplicity of the woods as a fine lady in full dress. This was also the haunt of a myrtle warbler in sombre black and white, quaintly decorated with four patches of bright yellow, and very much concerned about a nest somewhere in that lovely green world.

In this nook I was visited daily by a chickadee family, — "droll folk quite innocent of dignity," as Dr. Coues says, — who fascinated me with their pretty ways and the many strange utterances of their queer husky voices. At first, on finding an uninvited guest in their quarters, they were very circumspect, and carried on their conversation overhead in the oddest little squeaky tones, not to be heard ten feet away. Once an elderly bird got the floor and gave an address, perhaps pointing out the dangers to be feared from the monster sitting so silent under the cedar. The burden of his talk sounded to me like "chit-it-it-day! day!" but there were varied inflections, and it evidently meant something very serious, for every twitter was hushed, while the discourse

was loud, urgent, and snapped out in a way I never thought possible to the

"Merry little fellow with the cheery little voice."

The sermon, or lecture, was ended by one of the audience interrupting with the plaintive little two-note song of the family, upon which they all broke out chattering again, and scurried over the trees with a thousand antics.

So long as you do only what you have done every day, though it be to sit within three feet of their nest, most birds accept you as a necessary evil, but if you vary from your usual programme you shall have every bird within sight and hearing excited, calling in warning tones, anxious and angry "phit's," "tut's," and "chack's" on every side.

As the chickadees grew accustomed to my presence they became more demonstrative and voluble, showing me unsuspected capabilities of chickadese. Such squeaks and calls and remarkable notes, such animated discussions, and such irrepressible baby-talk, all in the husky voice of the family, were altogether enchanting. One infant sometimes

came alone, talking to himself, and at intervals essaying in a feeble, unsteady manner the "pe-wee" note of his race.

Again I have many times heard curious soliloquies in whispered tones. They could not be called songs, they were more like talk.

On one occasion the head of the family — as I suppose — flew down toward me, alighted just before my face not two feet away, and looked at me sharply. I spoke to him quietly in attempted imitation of his language, but my little effort at conversation was not a complete success, for after a short, not too civil answer, he flew away.

The crowning delight of my chickadee-study was the song to which I was treated one day. A bird was singing when I arrived, so that I stopped short of my seat and listened. The song was so low that it could not be heard unless one were very near, and in a tone so peculiar that I could not believe it came from a chickadee until I saw him. It consisted of the usual utterances differently arranged. There seemed to be, first, a succession of "dee-dee's" followed by a solitary "chick" a third lower, then the same re-

peated and interrupted by the "pe-wee," but all slurred together and given in tremolo style utterly unlike any chickadee performance I had ever heard. It was most bewitching, and was kept up a long time.

There is some reason to think this bird has unsuspected musical abilities. A friend and long-time bird-student had a chickadee who flew into the house and insisted upon staying, becoming perfectly tame and friendly with the family. One day one of his kind outside the window gave some calls which seemed rather peculiar to the listeners within. Upon hearing them, the bird inside, who was sitting quietly upon a picture-frame, burst into a really wonderful melody, such as the observer had never dreamed a chickadee was capable of. Though not loud, it seemed to fill the room, and not till she watched and saw the throat swell could she be convinced it was the performance of her bird.

Having at last settled myself in my usual place, and while waiting for the next caller to show himself, I had leisure to notice and admire the peculiar character of the woods; for Nature has infinite resources at command,

and no two spots are arranged on the same plan. Spruces were most prominent, with birches and maples to soften their severity, lighten their sombreness, and give a needed touch of grace. The mixture was felicitous. The white stems of the birch, "most shy and ladylike of trees," stood out finely against the dark spruces, just then decked with fresh tips to every twig, which gave somehow a rich velvety appearance to the foliage. The picturesque irregularity of the birch-trunks was very noticeable. Hardly one was straight. Some leaned to one side, as if it had been hard to get the delicate branches in between the stiff and angular boughs of the spruces among which they grew; others had turned this way and that, in wavering uncertainty, as if they had been unable to decide which way they would go, till they were full grown, and the indecisions of youth were perpetuated in a crooked trunk.

There was no appearance of indecision, past or present, about the spruces. Each stem stood as straight as a fresh West Point cadet. There was never an instant's doubt in what direction one of those sturdy trees

had set its heart. Straight up was the aim of every one, and straight up it went; stern, unbending, self-willed, like some of our own race, with branches at right angles on every side, let neighbors less strong of purpose fare as they could.

The beauties and idiosyncrasies of these woods might be enjoyed at leisure, for they possessed one great advantage over any other I have found east of the Rocky Mountains. Through all this month of July which I spent among them, not a fly showed his impertinent head, and mosquitoes appeared but rarely. When any of the latter did make themselves obvious, they presented their little bills in the most modest manner. They asked so very, very little, and asked it so gently, no one could refuse or resent it. It was darkly whispered by those who in the past had outstayed July, that the whole season was not so blessed; that insect hordes were simply biding their time, and later they would come out in force. But later one need not be here.

Warblers, however bewitching, — and I admit their claims, — and woods, however

suggestive and delightful, could not content me long; for voices were calling from above, voices most potent of all, — thrushes. After an hour under the cedar I resumed my stony way up the hill to the edge of an opening where trees had been felled, — a "cut-out," as it is called, — and there, on a conveniently placed rock, I waited for who might come. One day, as I sat there, a royal guest in rich warm brown and white appeared, alighted on a small tree, and threw up his tail in characteristic fashion; then his eye fell on me, perhaps thirty feet away. I remained motionless while the bird — a hermit-thrush — took a long and close look at the intruder upon his grounds. Quiet as I might be, it was plain the beautiful creature was not for a moment deceived. He recognized me as one of the race against whom he must be on his guard. He wished to pass on, but panic or even vulgar haste is not in his nature. He stood a few moments, calmly answered a hermit-call from the woods then without hurry flew to the ground, ran lightly along to a rock, on the highest peak of which he paused again, tossed his tail, and looked at

me; then on again to the next rock, where he repeated the programme. And so he proceeded, greeting me gracefully from the top of every eminence before he ran on to the next, until he gained the cover of the woods across the open, — all in the most dignified way.

This experience seemed to give the bird courage, for the next time he found me in my customary seat he mounted a stump, sang a snatch of his song, ran to a low bush and added a few more notes, came to the ground, where he foraged among the dead leaves a minute, then up again on a bent sapling, bubbling over in joyous notes; and thus he went on singing and eating in the most captivating way, and in apparent indifference to his unobtrusive but delighted spectator on the rock. I was surprised; this bird being one of our greatest singers, I had a feeling that a certain amount of "dress parade" must accompany his performance. Indeed, those of his kind I had seen before had always taken a "position" to sing.

If the hermit-thrush could be persuaded to end his chant with the second clause, he would be unapproachable as a musical per-

former, as he and his near relations are already in quality of voice. But he seems to be possessed of an unfortunate desire to sing higher than his register, and invariably, so far as I have heard, he persists in this effort, and goes all to pieces on the high note. At least so his song sounds to one listener who finds the heavenly first clauses sadly marred by the closing one.

The most exquisite, and altogether extraordinary exhibition of hermit-thrush possibilities I have heard, strange to say, from a captive. A bird who had flown against a house in the fall migration had been picked up, stunned. He was plainly a young bird of the year, not in the least afraid of people, and he soon became perfectly tame, while he solaced the long hours of idleness with the glorious full song of the species. But the exhibition that captivated my soul was his low undertone notes, so liquid and bubbling in character, so inexpressibly sweet and thrilling, and so evidently out of a joyous heart.

Somewhere on this attractive wood road was hidden an oven-bird's nest which I wanted much to see. I never thought, how-

ever, of undertaking the hopeless task of hunting for it; but one day, when I happened upon one of the birds with worms in her mouth, prepared to feed her brood, I was seized with the hope that she would be simple enough to point it out to me, and at once devoted my whole attention to watching her movements. Her tactics were admirable. When she first saw me she stood on a low bush and stared at me, head-feathers erected like a crest, showing plainly the golden crown that gives the name, "golden-crowned warbler," and uttering her curious "smack." In a few minutes she was joined by her mate, also with a mouthful of squirming provisions.

For some time the pair stood still, doubtless waiting for me to pass on; but finding that I did not leave, they grew impatient and began moving about. The female would go to the ground with an air of the greatest caution, run about among the leaves and fallen sticks as if she had important business, every moment glancing at me, till she came to a slight ridge of earth, or a small rock or log, behind which she would straightway vanish. In vain did I watch intently for

her to reappear on the other side. No doubt, as soon as she found herself out of my sight she ran like a mouse, keeping the stone or log well between us as a screen. Meanwhile her mate aided her efforts nobly by making himself most conspicuous, fidgeting about on his bush, mounting a stump and singing "teacher! teacher! teacher!" at the top of his voice, as if calling for help, and in every way trying to keep my attention fixed upon him. After a while the other party to the little game would fly up from a point far away from where she had disappeared, with an empty beak and an innocent air of never having dreamed of a nest, and begin to "smack," as when she first discovered me. Then it was her turn to keep me diverted while her mate slipped away. Sometimes they embarrassed me further by separating widely, so that I could not keep my eyes on both. In fact, after some hours given to the beguilements of this brave pair, and much searching among the dead leaves in places they had apparently pointed out, I was obliged to confess myself outwitted by the clever little actors.

"All birds have some traits," says a life-long bird-student, "that it is impossible to understand."

A friend, a daughter of Maine, who has watched the birds of her state for several years, had an interesting experience with a pair of oven-birds, which she gives me permission to tell.

She was walking in the woods when her eyes — always looking for birds — fell upon an oven-bird on the ground before her. He was walking jauntily along as if he had nothing particular on his mind, and — wonderful to say — singing as he went. It was not the ordinary "teacher! teacher!" but a sweet, low song like his charming flight-song, — evidently a love strain. On he walked in his dainty way, and on followed his enraptured listener. She had no doubt he was leading her away from his nest, but so long as he sang she did not care what was left behind. Nothing could be more bewitching than the song and his manner, sometimes half concealed by a patch of leaves, again coming out into the sunshine, showing his golden crown.

When at last the bird had flown, and his follower had recovered her senses and returned, she had the unprecedented luck to come upon the mate — as she supposes — of the beguiling singer. By her demonstrations the nest was easily located by a trained nest-hunter who knew where to look, and visited daily from that time. The mother-bird, though never in a panic, did not enjoy her presence, and had various ways of showing her displeasure. Sometimes she walked around in a circle, of which the nest was the centre; again she flew up to a tree and waited for her visitor to leave; once she tried the well-worn trick of leading an unwelcome guest away, by walking off as if a nest were the last thing she thought of, leading her willing follower a long way from the precious spot before she flew. The nest was a little mound of leaves and grass, to look into which the student was obliged to get on to her knees, and bring her face to a level with the entrance. But she was well repaid, for there was the treasure, the cozy cradle with its three eggs.

WHIMSICAL WHITE-THROATS

A woodland walk,
A quest of river grapes, a mocking thrush,
A wild rose or rock-loving columbine,
Salve my worst wounds.

Emerson.

III

WHIMSICAL WHITE-THROATS

FAR more perplexing than the oven-bird's eccentricities was the conduct of a bird in another part of the island. One day, with a fellow bird-lover, I was walking down a shady road that led to the sea. I was in search of a rare warbler, but not because it was rare. Rarity has no special charms for me. The cleverest monstrosity of the florist's art is not so welcome to me as a daisy — even if it is called "whiteweed"; no deformed, double, forced rose affords me so much pleasure as the fragrant wilding beside the road; no old musty black-letter tome gives half the joy I receive from a brand-new edition of a writer I love, with leaves nicely cut and smooth to my fingers, — in all of which tastes I know I am hopelessly out of fashion. So it was not because he was rare that I sought him, but because I had been attracted by his mysterious ways,

his wariness in escaping the eyes and guns of collectors.

Part of the way the path ran through a bit of woods, wholly old spruces, gloomy and high-arched, with softest carpet of fallen needles and green mosses, — a grim and sombre, yet somehow a noble way, with its peacefulness and its unobscured views on every side. We had emerged from the woods and were passing along the deserted road, listening as usual to various bird-notes, — prominent among them, as it invariably is wherever it is heard, that of New England's bird, the white-throated sparrow. Suddenly, on one side, a rather harsh voice broke out into three or four loud, ringing triplets, — a rough imitation, as it seemed, of part of the white-throat's song, though differing from the genuine both in manner and in quality.

"Some boy's poor attempt," I said. "I could do better myself"; and we went on, a little annoyed at this intrusion upon our quiet.

In a moment we passed beyond the close border of greenery beside the road, and came into view of some very tall old trees farther

back. Again the loud, incisive notes rang out, sounding even less birdlike than before; and casting my eyes toward the quarter whence they came, I was astounded to see that they were produced by a bird perched on the top twig of the tallest spruce. In an instant our glasses were up, but so far away, and against a white cloudy sky, he was unrecognizable. Whoever he might be, he was evidently proud of his achievement, for he stood there in plain sight, and repeated his mockery, till he had every white-throat in the neighborhood wild, singing at the top of his voice, though not one of them could compete with him in power.

But who could this wonderful mimic be? Hopeless of identifying him that evening, we went home completely mystified, resolved to return in the morning to hunt him down. Long after I reached the house I heard his loud, penetrating notes, though not another bird-voice reached me from that distance. Moreover, I found a white-throat near home so excited that he could not sleep, for three or four times during the night, which was very dark, I heard him utter his song.

At the first opportunity we went again down the shady road, and placed ourselves beside a clump of trees, near where the mysterious bird had sung. Before long we heard him afar, and he gradually approached, singing as he came, till at last he obligingly flew to the top of a small tree, perhaps fifteen feet high and twenty feet from us, and, with eccentric flourishes of body, shouted out his extraordinary solo. But again we could not see him well, for the sun was behind him. We carefully studied his unique performance, however, and while in arrangement it greatly resembled part of the song of the white-throat, being three sets of triplets rapidly repeated, it differed in every other way.

The song of the white-throat is dignified, calm, and tranquil in tone and manner, while his clumsy mocker threw his head far back and flung his notes into the air with the utmost vehemence and abandon, and with great apparent effort. He was restless, constantly fidgeting, throwing up his tail, and jerking himself about in the pauses of his song. In the genuine melody the triplets sound like

one note "shaken," but the imitator gave the three as distinct and staccato as if each one were a word. Again, the white-throat is a modest singer, but this stranger allowed us to level our glasses at him, move about, and talk, and he was as unconcerned through all as a robin. Everything indicated that he was a mere mocker, and not a good one at that.

We noted all these points carefully, discussing them freely and comparing our impressions, before the bird flew. This time he alighted farther off, on a taller tree, but the light was in our favor and my glass was good. I saw at once that his throat was white, and when, in one of his pauses, he put his head down to arrange the plumage of his breast, conspicuous stripes over the crown came into view, and I was startled. In a moment he confirmed my sudden suspicion by turning his back to us, thereby showing his sparrow colors.

He was a white-throat himself!

I was more surprised than if I had found him anything else. If he were one of the family, whence this astonishing eccentricity?

Why did he not sing in a white-throat voice, and the proper white-throat song? Why should he so far depart from the ways of his kindred as to shout from the top of the tallest tree in that bold way, and what object could he have in setting the whole tribe frantic? Had he secured a white-throat mate with that intolerable voice, and had he a family coming up to imitate his unnatural performance? Or was he a disappointed bachelor, aiming to stir up his domestic brethren?

All these questions pressed to our lips, but there was no reply; and as long as we stayed he continued to render his triplets, sometimes prefacing them with the two or three long notes that belong to them, but all on the same key, utterly unlike his fellows, and loud enough to be heard a mile away.

The solo of the white-throated sparrow differs from nearly all other bird-songs that I know, being a clear, distinct whistle that may easily be reduced to our musical scale, and perfectly imitated by the human voice; in this latter quality it is almost unique. The notes are very few, usually two, never, I

think, more than three; and the little ditty consists of, first, a single long, deliberate note, then two short repetitions of one a third higher, followed by three triplets at the same pitch. It is so distinct, indeed, that the Chippewa Indians of northern Minnesota — as a traveler in that country kindly wrote me — have put it into words, namely, "Pu'orn chiman, chig-a-big, chig-a-big, chig-a-big," which being translated means, "The Sioux canoes are close to shore, close to shore, close to shore," and the friendly bird is held in much esteem by the grateful Chippewas.

There seems small chance for changes in such a limited register, but I found the song capable of very different arrangements, and on recording those I had heard I was surprised to see that I had noted seventeen distinct ones. How many variations were made by one bird I was not able to determine, from the difficulty of keeping one under observation, now that the young were able to go about and nobody was confined to any special locality. But one I was able to watch certainly sang three songs, and I know no

reason why he may not have sung a dozen. I am obliged to confess that although it is delightful to hear one of these sparrows, or two together, a chorus of a dozen or more must be considered a failure, as music. Each bird has a decided musical pitch of his own, and unless the several singers happen to harmonize they produce an unpleasant discord.

One study my neighboring white-throat gave me, which interested me very much,— a young bird at his music-lessons. I heard him as I sat on the piazza resting, for he was very near. He began by attempting one note alone, or sometimes two, and his trouble was to get the pitch. After his feeble efforts, the full, clear notes of the elder would ring out as if to afford a copy. Then the youngster tried again, and so they would go on for some time. I knew it was two birds and not one alone, because the notes would sometimes clash. He practiced faithfully till he mastered the first three notes at proper intervals, but the pitch seemed to be his despair, and I never heard him attempt the triplets.

After the disappointing solution to the

mystery which had so interested me, and while there still remained ten days of the second summer month, that lovely corner of the world was wrapped in a smothering fog, which came in the afternoon and remained all night, with rain. The next morning was clear and bright, but a strange hush had fallen upon us. Not a bird-note was to be heard save —

"The gossip of swallows all through the sky."

Warblers and thrushes, white-throats and even juncoes, seemed to have departed in a body. All day this unnatural silence continued. I was alarmed. Had migration already begun? Had the warblers, who heretofore had hardly moved without uttering their little calls and cries, taken leave for the season? Had the olive-backed thrush, so voluble only the day before, been suddenly stricken dumb?

I made many excursions to see if the birds had really gone so early. Now and then in my rambles I came upon a black-throated green warbler, whose song had heretofore made the woods resound, going about shyly

and without a peep; and a glimpse or two I had of others, preserving the same unaccountable quiet. Even the stony pathway, rallying-place for nearly all the bird population, was now silent as a desert way, and melancholy as a tomb to the bird-lover, and I was forced to conclude that if not absolutely departed, these tiny fellow creatures were engaged in putting on their traveling-suits for the long journey.

THE QUEST OF A THRUSH

THE world rolls round, mistrust it not ;
Befalls again what once befell ;
All things return, both sphere and mote,
And I shall hear my thrush's note.

EMERSON.

IV

THE QUEST OF A THRUSH

THE FIRST YEAR

To an enthusiastic bird-student nothing is so alluring, so irresistibly attractive, as an unfamiliar bird-song. Until the mystery is solved, the unknown singer seen and identified, there is no rest for the eager pursuer. If it chance that the spirit is hampered by the body, if the student is unable to scramble over rocks, tear through jungles, and wade swamps hour after hour and day after day, the case becomes sometimes really desperate, and admirable opportunity is offered to cultivate philosophy, to "learn to wait" in a proper spirit.

Several times since my eyes were opened to the delights of bird-study I have fallen under a spell of the sort. In most cases I have been able to solve the problem and name my bird at last, but in two or three

cases the mystery is a mystery still, and the tantalizing notes haunt me yet. In one instance it was a wild ringing song, resembling that of the winter wren, heard years ago on the coast of Maine; another was a strange monologue, half song, half talk, heard in the early morning before I could get to the window, in the western part of the same state. Neither of these was ever traced to its source.

Generally, however, I have been more fortunate. Three years of watching were required to become somewhat familiar with the domestic life of the veery, or tawny thrush, though much yet remains to be discovered, and three more have passed in quest of another of the beguiling family, — the olive-backed or Swainson's thrush. Nor am I yet satisfied; I am still in pursuit.

The search began two years before the chronicle of the preceding chapter, in a rather wild part of the Pine-Tree State. Out of a piece of wood at some distance from the farmhouse where I was staying, and separated from it by an impassable swamp, came one evening a loud call in the peculiar

tremulous tones of the veery, sounding to me like "Wake up! Judy!" the first two notes with falling, the last two with rising inflection. As evening of that first day drew on, the call to Judy was accompanied by other sounds uttered in the same voice, a loud ringing song or recitative composed of similar ejaculations, with varied modulations that gave it greater resemblance to conversation than to music. Indeed, while I sat and listened through the long twilight to two or three birds calling and answering one another from distant tree-tops, I could not rid myself of the fancy that they were exchanging opinions across their green world.

The country was beautiful, bobolinks sang enchantingly almost under my window, warblers and hermit-thrushes made musical the woods behind the house, but the singer I could not name was the most bewitching of all. If I could not trace him, I could at least fly from him, and so I did. I packed my belongings and took a bee-line across the state to the Island where my story begins. I settled myself in the nook already described and prepared to forget, or try to for-

get, the puzzling song. But fate was kinder than I dared hope. The very first morning I was wakened by an unfamiliar and remarkable bird-note, a low, liquid "quit," sometimes followed by an explosive sound, — a sort of subdued squawk. This sound was a nasal "a," like "a" in "man." The bird said "quit-a" in that tone, and with so much emphasis on the second syllable that it had an explosive effect. Naturally this mystified me and aroused great interest, especially because, in spite of my persistent efforts, I was unable to get a glimpse of the bird.

This state of affairs continued for several days. But as we have been told, and as some of us know, "all things come in time to him who can wait." To me at last came my chance. One afternoon there rolled in upon us, from our restless neighbor, the sea, an all-embracing fog, which gradually enfolded us till we were closely wrapped as in a heavy blanket. The fog-bell on a point near by tolled dismally, and a more distant whistling-buoy sent out at intervals a groan, as if wailing for all who had found graves beside the rocks it was now set to guard. All night

this continued, and in the morning the fog was lighter, but a steady rain was falling. Now, I thought, is my time to see the stranger who has so interested me; for in a steady rain birds find it somewhat less comfortable on the tree-tops, and incline to get under the leafy roofs for shelter as well as for food. Duly encumbered by wraps and protectors that man has devised as shields from the weather, I hastened to a bit of the woods where for a few rods it was level and penetrable, and where I had heard the luring voice. Here, with some difficulty, I found a spot firm enough to support the legs of my chair, and settled myself to wait.

More conspicuous than ever were the contrasted tree-trunks, as the dampness turned the spruces black, and brought out the beauty of the decorative lichens in every shade of green, from almost white to dead black, with here and there bits of pink and drab, all standing up, living and beautiful as always in a soaking rain. Even the rocks were glorified by great patches of these curious plants, which show freshness and life only when wet, the tender blue-green leaves,

— if one may call them so, — with their rich brown lining, all expanded in exquisite ruffle-like convolutions.

Spruce trunks had also another peculiarity. As they had grown they had shed their youthful branches. One young tree, not more than ten feet high, had already dropped off twenty-seven branchlets, retaining only a few at the top, and bending all its energies to the task of reaching and penetrating the thick green roof to the sunlight above. Each limb, as it broke off, left a part, a few inches or a foot long, standing straight out from the trunk, the whole forming a sort of circular ladder, by which it seemed one might mount to the upper regions, and, better yet, offering convenient perches for the feathered woodlanders.

While I was absorbed in admiration of my surroundings a bird-note fell upon my ear, a low "quit" in an unmistakable thrush tone. Turning my eyes quickly, I saw the speaker, standing on a round of the ladder encircling a tall old spruce-tree at the outer edge of the little clearing, pioneer of that bit of woods. Very slowly I brought my glass

to bear upon him. A thrush, certainly, but none that I knew; neither hermit, wood, nor tawny. While I tried to see some characteristic by which to identify him, he spoke again, this time the rich "quit" with the peculiar added squawk, as I will call it, which had mystified me in the mornings. Meanwhile another of the family came noiselessly to a tree over my head, and whispered the same cry in an indescribably sweet and liquid tone. Still I looked in silence, and still the bird remained on the spruce. But after a while the danger of the presence of one of the human family seemed to be borne in upon him, and he suddenly startled me with a new sound, a sort of shriek, loud and on a much higher key. Even then I remained motionless; at last he grew somewhat more calm, and as if to put my last doubt to rest and to prove that he alone was author of all the sounds that had perplexed me, he began to sing in a low tone many of the strange clauses that I had heard shouted from the tree-tops. Finally, when confidence was assured by my unvarying stillness, he flew to another tree-trunk, then to a second,

and at last to the ground, where he busied himself among the dead leaves.

I continued to sit without moving, and presently another of the family came about, with manners somewhat different. He stood on one of the broken branches, in plain sight, and treated me to a curious exhibition. Beginning with the usual "quit," very loud and on a high key, he repeated it many times, each repetition being lower in pitch and softer, till it became the merest murmur, almost inaudible at my short distance, with eyes fixed on me all the time. Strangely enough, as he proceeded, one after another of the birds around us — warblers, juncoes, and others — was hushed, till not a sound was heard excepting the rain on the leaves overhead. Then, having reduced his small world to absolute silence, he broke into a queer medley, whether song or scold, or a mixture of both, I could only guess. First came the common call uttered in the customary tone, then this call with added squawk, then the startling shriek on a high key, and after that a combination of all with some scraps of song. It was a confused jumble of

all his accomplishments, forming a *potpourri* such as I never heard from thrush before. I was greatly interested in this exhibition of his character, and surprised at his versatility. Though he lacked the serene repose, the perfect dignity, of some of his family, he was a bird of marked individuality, and one well worthy of study.

The utterance of this bird, though charming and delightful to hear, has never seemed to me to merit the name of song. It has always impressed me, from the first moment I heard it in that far-off bit of woods, as a conversation. The clauses are of varying length, some with rising and others with falling inflection, three or four or sometimes as many as seven syllables in a clause, with pauses between, and without regularity so far as I can discover, and all on one note. Although not much given to trying to represent the notes of birds by our words, I will say that his clauses always sounded to me like variations on the theme "Er-rick-er-ree." His common call was like "er-rè-hu!" with strong accent on the second syllable.

After two hours with the thrush, — the

olive-backed, or Swainson's, as I found out later, — I turned from the woods and made my way back, very wet indeed, but very happy; for I had added an acquaintance to my delightful list, and henceforth, whenever his peculiar inspiring notes might fall upon my ear, I should know him. Many evenings and mornings were passed listening to his song, and at last I felt familiar with every loud utterance of the bird, and was content to wait till some future summer for the pleasure of seeing him in his domestic relations and knowing him more intimately.

One thing more I must add to this year's chronicle of the olive-backed thrush: A friend who had the happiness to see a family of five olive-backed younglings take flight in the woods close by, brought me the nest and its surroundings. It was an exquisite affair; being the whole upper part of a young spruce six or seven feet high, with the little homestead two feet from the top, resting on three branchlets and surrounded by many more. And as the leaves fell off, revealing the delicately marked golden-brown twigs forming a complete protection on every side,

it was picturesque and beautiful, worthy of a highly original member of one of our most characteristic and interesting bird families.

This was delightful, but it was not satisfactory. Not until the bird is seen at home in his domestic rôle, and the life about the nest is studied, does one really know him.

TRIBULATIONS BY THE WAY.

THE SECOND YEAR

The second year I started out with the one sole object of finding and knowing the olive-backed thrush. I had meanwhile taken pains to inform myself of several places where the bird was known to nest, and I went with confidence.

"You 'll be sure to find your thrush," said a beguiling voice, "on the top of Mount ——."

Accordingly my first destination was a club-house on top of a mountain in a New England state, which was to be occupied that summer by the keeper's family alone.

Of the rough and weary way to reach that spot I spare my readers the details: the

high country-wagon stage; the many miles dreary climb to the summit, where I was met; the two miles to "get in" through the woods, over an impossible, worn-out corduroy road, in which loose, wabbling logs alternated with fathomless pitch-holes, in a shaky old buggy constantly threatening dissolution, with a horse too small to inspire confidence, and the whole bridging an apparently bottomless swamp. The passage was a series of violent jerks, in every one of which it seemed the vehicle would come to pieces, and which soon drove the solitary passenger to her feet, where she performed gymnastic feats of jumping crevasses, balancing on floating logs, scaling cliffs, and extricating herself from pitfalls — which shall be veiled in oblivion.

The house at which the dismal procession at last arrived was a comfortable summer cottage, with, however, the slight disadvantages that the window-shades would not come down and bedroom doors would not shut.

"We 're so far from everybody," said the smiling hostess, "we never think of drawing down shades or locking doors."

But that night came up a severe thunder-storm, and drawn shades and closed doors took on a new importance. In all other respects the place was very nice and pleasant.

As I sat on the piazza that evening, I noticed first an ominous absence of bird-voices, and next the presence of a numerous frog population about the little lake close by. The musical performances of these voluble reptiles began about sunset and increased in volume and power till nothing else could be heard. If all the thrushes in the state had assembled in that spot and sung their loudest, they could not have been heard above the awful volume of frog-voices. Moreover, not a note of the olive-back had been heard near the house.

When I laid my head on the pillow that night with three staring, shadeless windows open to the lightning, I decided that it would not do. I could stand the loneliness — in fact, I liked that; I might endure the frogs; it would not be impossible to console myself for the absence of the bird; I could probably live through a nightly thunder-storm —

for on questioning my host I learned the frequency of that entertainment; I could no doubt learn to dispense with such little things as window-shades and closed doors. I might, perhaps, reconcile myself to any one of these, but all of them combined was too much for my philosophy. So "in the morning," I said to myself, blinking before an unusually vivid flash, "in the morning I'll go back down the mountain the other way," for I had discovered there was another way.

But in the morning it poured, and I did not like to ask to be taken back. Two days the downpour kept me prisoner, but the third morning dawned cloudy, but not absolutely raining, and very early, in order to meet the "stage" as it passed the road below, we started down the mountain with the same rickety buggy and inadequate horse. This road was mostly a steep descent of three miles, and again I omit the details. Suffice it to say that I proved myself a tolerable pedestrian before we met the stage, which drew up with the cheerful information that it was full.

Despair made me eloquent, and the kindly passengers crowded up together and gave me a cramped seat on the end of a board. Of that ride I could a tale unfold: of the sick horse and the driver walking to spare him, half the time out of sight, leaving the reins in the hands of an indifferent girl, who allowed the horses to wander from side to side at will; and of the fatigue of the unusual walk and the uncomfortable seat. At the summit we were promised a fresh team, for in avoiding the corduroy outlet I had subjected myself to the ascent as well as the descent of the mountain. The new team was fresh indeed. They nearly wrecked us on the start before the exasperatingly leisurely driver had taken his seat, and while the lines hung loose over the box. Then they ran madly down the first hill in spite of brake and driver's shouts, galloped across the short level and ran down the next pitch, the mud splashing high, and tug-strap hanging. It was a sadly demoralized looking and feeling crowd that drew up at last before a hotel; and as I climbed painfully down the step-ladder way, — the only alternative from a

flying leap, — I registered a vow in my heart never again to trust to the idiosyncrasies of horses and drivers; to confine my travels to places attainable by steam, electricity, cable, or any other power which *has no will of its own.*

The next place on the programme where the olive-backed thrush was promised was in the adjoining state about opposite on the map, and by taking five trains and consuming five hours, mostly in waiting in stations, I reached the place towards evening the next day, and found to my dismay that I was seven miles from the village. Here I was already again at the mercy of horse and man-power.

This horse and this man were of a different sort, however, and landed me safely at the farmhouse up in the mountains.

The next morning I set out to find my thrush, going at once to a piece of woods where my correspondent had said they were to be found in numbers nesting.

It was nesting-time, and my confident correspondent was a bird-student of years' standing; now I was sure of my bird. I

passed through a grassy lane, and entered the woods at the foot. There I seated myself as comfortably as circumstances allowed, and proceeded to "wait" again.

The place was suffering from a plague of caterpillars. Everything about the house was covered with them, — the piazza, the front of the house, the board walks, and the tree-trunks. One could not step without first looking to see that one did not crush a caterpillar, nor sit on a bench without clearing it of these unpleasant creatures. There in the woods they covered the trees, and made a sound like the dropping of a light rain.

Ugh! how could birds — dainty, beautiful creatures — live amid such an army! It was soon apparent that they shared my repugnance, for there appeared a warbler or two at rare intervals, two or three veeries at a distance — and nothing else. Hours I sat there, loath to give up hope, not only that first day, but several succeeding ones, but never a note of the long-sought bird was heard. I was forced to conclude that my friend had been mistaken in her identification, for other

thrushes were in another piece of woods near by, or that the birds had retired before the caterpillar army.

The annoyances that seem involuntarily to spring up around a bird-student did not fail to appear in this place. The sudden conversion of the grassy lane into a pasture by closing the gate and turning cows into it; the confining a vicious horse in a field with bars near my seat, which imprisonment the animal resented by pushing against the shaky old bars, threatening every minute to break through; the sudden attack of a fever of building or repairing the road, or cutting grass, which brought men and horses and lumber and great noise and unpleasantness about. All these, and more, grouped themselves as usual in that place, and completed the desolation the caterpillars had so well begun.

One interesting study I made of the ways of a party of Baltimore orioles that season. There were at first three of the gorgeous black and gold singers, on the most friendly terms with one another, perching close together on a branch, going down in the grass

in a party, hunting insects socially on the apple-trees, climbing the trunk of an elm side by side, and singing and playing together, often till late in the evening.

That conduct of itself was remarkable, but stranger still was the fact that they sang exactly the same song, a thing I never before heard two birds do. This, in connection with their friendliness, made me think it probable that the three were brothers, reared in the same nest, and taught to sing by the same father.

> "Through orchards tinted with the rose
> In middle May the oriole goes,
> His flute notes trying ever."

It was then the middle of May, and I watched with interest to see how their matrimonial affairs would settle themselves. The selection of partners was accomplished in a way satisfactory to all, and as quietly as if they were "old married folk," as, indeed, who knows but they were!

Though I was never absent very long, I did not see the process, to my great regret. I suddenly found them all provided with mates, talking together in low soft under-

tones, and evidently with serious business on hand. The three no longer played together, but they never quarreled.

This trio and their mates gave utterance to a great variety of notes, both musical and conversational, and some were strikingly like articulate speech. Also, both sexes sang. The males had, in addition to the usual sort of song, another peculiar seven-note strain, very different from anything I ever heard. Sometimes in the middle of this song the singer would interpolate an exquisitely rapturous note or two, as if the "beloved object" had suddenly appeared.

Before the end of May the three families were settled and busily building. One before my window on the upper branch of an elm where I could easily watch it, another in the top of an apple-tree, and the third in a maple across the road where —

> "High o'er the loud and dusty road
> The soft gray cup in safety hung."

The elm-tree nest was framed when I discovered it and the female was finishing it, working entirely from the inside, thrusting the material through and drawing the ends

in, making all smooth and strong. This was the nest from which a chebec pilfered material, as related elsewhere.

The nest of the apple-tree bird was not a typical oriole nest, being in an upright crotch and hung like a vireo's nest.

I was unable to stay to watch the family life of these interesting birds, which I regretted, for some of the most attractive of bird-notes are those passing between parents and young. I had in another place a glimpse into oriole family government which suggested that there might be much to learn of their ways. I was standing under a tree for a moment when I heard an oriole baby-cry over my head. Instantly there was a great commotion in the tree and a Baltimore oriole flew out and alighted in a tree a little way off. He was greatly disturbed and stood there watching me, flirting his wings and jerking his body in excitement while scolding his loudest. In a moment his mate joined him with a worm in her mouth, and added her distress to his. After a few minutes' calling without response, the father suddenly gave a peculiar whistle, loud and clear,

and strikingly like a man's whistle to his dog. Instantly the young one flew out of the tree over my head, and joined his parents, and all flew away.

Besides this I had already discovered that mountains are not desirable for bird-study — at least for mine. There is too much weather. When it was not raining it blew a gale, before which birds were silent, and so far as possible, invisible.

Here ends my search for the witching thrush, — I said, — I shall seek him no more. I took leave of the mountains, storms, and caterpillars, and betook myself to a quiet nook beside the sea, intending to confine my attention to warblers and white-throat sparrows, and other birds I had seen there before.

THE NEST AT LAST

THE THIRD YEAR

When was ever a bird-lover known finally to abandon a search so long as the faintest hope remained! I knew where the olive-backed thrush did live, and the next year

— the third in my search — an irresistible drawing brought me again to his country, to the same comfortable cottage on the coast.

There, sure enough, were the birds, voluble as ever. Their soft, peculiar calls came from every side, and their strange recitatives or conversation resounded from the treetops.

Now must be made a confession: I am quick to know a bird's note, and no one can outdo me in patience and long-suffering in watching them — but I have not the gift of finding nests. Nothing seemed more hopeless than to search that impenetrable jungle of close-growing spruces, while retaining uncertain footing on rocks lying at all angles, and slippery with dry spruce-needles. I did not attempt it. I resumed my walks, down to the shore, up the stony pathway to the woods, and enjoyed the birds everywhere.

The olive-backs soon made themselves obvious. About four A. M. they came around the house uttering their quiet, reserved, far-off "chack." It seemed that a dozen might

be close to us, yet they moved about so silently that the most careful search with a glass would not show one. Then later in the day they threw off their early morning reserve, and shouted their inquiries and bits of advice across the tree-tops to one another, with perfect abandon.

Sometimes a bird took his stand on the tip-top of a spruce, sang his usual phrases, and between them uttered low "chacks" and other notes, as I have heard the wood-thrush, hermit, and tawny, "talk to themselves."

The most fascinating of bird-utterances, to me, are the low-toned ones not intended for the world at large. Not "talk" between two, neither notes of warning, nor of welcome, but plainly soliloquies, murmurs, trills, gurgles, and other indescribable sounds, evidently for their own enjoyment. Such I often hear over my head or behind my back, when I cannot stir without ending them. The finest song, and the greatest variety of shouts and calls to the general public, give me not half the pleasure I feel when listening to these contented and happy little strains

that assure me a fellow creature finds joy in living, and makes me know that his life is not passed in constant terror.

"Oft may you thread the woods in vain
To see what singer piped the strain.
Seek not, and the little eremite
Flies gayly forth and sings in sight."

So it proved here; I had given up my search — and at once I found my bird. His soft peculiar notes and calls echoed all about me, and his strange conversational recitatives resounded from the tree-tops.

Still greater happiness was promised. The very next morning a bird-loving friend, who has what I lack, — the gift of finding nests, — met me with the announcement: —

"I 've found a nest for you!"

And so he had: a nest of the olive-backed thrush, with four eggs and the bird sitting. Joy at last!

I hurried down to the spot. The nest was in a tangle of young spruces, and not well placed for study. Birds do not consult our convenience; in fact, I 'm afraid they carefully consult our inconvenience, selecting the most inaccessible situations. The tangle was

impenetrable and on a sharply sloping hill-side. To see it at all I was obliged to sit much nearer than I liked, and constantly brace myself to retain my position.

As I feared, the birds did not accept my presence kindly. Like the veery, whom he resembles, the olive-back is intolerant of intrusions upon his domestic affairs. The presence of a spy, however respectful she may be, is so distressing to the pair, that I have no pleasure in trying to watch them. But I had sought so long! I hardened my heart and resolved to stay.

One hour's stay I made by the nest to which the owners refused to return. Then, lest harm come to the eggs, I left. The next morning I made another call — the nest was empty! The eggs had doubtless made a breakfast for some squirrel, of which the grove was full. If I could only be sure I had not pointed it out to him!

To soften my disappointment a second friend announced a nest she had been studying two or three days, and I went with her a mile along a beautiful road on another part of the island.

The nest was just off the road in a spruce-tree, perhaps six feet from the ground, and in this case, too, we were obliged to sit nearer than I felt would be agreeable to the birds. Two or three hours we retained our places, and after some hesitation the birds did return to feed the little family.

We did not try them too long, and I left feeling very happy and hoping that now I should really know the bird.

Alas and alas! the next day my friend brought me — the nest! She had found it empty excepting one dead nestling. This little unfortunate was well feathered and would have flown in a few days. We suppose the mischief was done by a black snake, which kills by constriction and often leaves part of his victims in the nest.

And so ends my three years' quest, but the subject is not closed. This year again I have heard his voice. Beyond the far Rocky Mountains, on the shore of the Pacific Ocean, the same song, the same eager conversation across the tree-tops saluted me, annihilating distance and transporting me instantly to the dear old rocks and woods

of New England. The bird had probably another name, for his tail may have been a half inch longer, or his coat a half shade darker or lighter, than our bird, but his voice was the same, his manners were the same, and his heart, I am sure, was the same as his brother's across the continent.

ON FAIR CASCO BAY

"If e'er you sail on Casco Bay,

. . . .

Your soul, like birds at break of day,
Will rise for many a joyous flight
Midst Summer Isles of Casco Bay."

V

ON FAIR CASCO BAY

On the outer edge of that beautiful bay, lying broadside to the sea, is a long narrow island, not yet much known of the world, but beloved above all by the few who have fallen under its spell. On it is to be found — by those who know — that rare thing in our busy, bustling world, a quiet corner, a real retreat.

This delightful spot is at the far end of the island, beyond the fisherman's village with its store and post-office, beyond the "Row" standing bare and bleak on the ocean front, beyond the Bathing Cove and the Sunset Rock and the Giant's Staircase and the other regulation show places. The main part of the island is given up to summer cottages, to varied structures of wood and paint, to tennis-courts and bicycle-paths, and the thousand and one things needed by "summer people" to pass away the season.

But hills and distance and lack of attractions had at the time of my study kept every echo of the outside world from the wooded portion, where, close beside the spruces, nestles a solitary, old-fashioned cottage.

Little of the dust of man's coming and going reached that spot. On the only road — a half-worn path in the grass — horse or vehicle seldom appeared. Days passed without sight of a person, and the woods were almost as deserted as if there were not a soul on the island.

The earnest student who desires to get into close sympathy with the birds and their world, to enter into their lives, to understand them, and be able to interpret them to others, must know how to be happy away from people. Nature will not reveal herself to a crowd. It will cost him the single-hearted devotion of a life. He must be alert day and night, with ears tuned to every bird-note, and eyes always awake to every rustling leaf or flitting shadow. It will cost sometimes the good will of people, who will set him (or more especially her) down as unsocial, not to say eccentric.

Particularly well fitted for this beautiful work is one naturally gifted with a love of solitude, who can say with the immortal Hosea —

> "There 's times when I 'm unsocial as a stone
> And sort o' suffocate to be alone."

Not that he need lead a hermit's life, but he should be contented to spend hours or days, or still better, weeks, entirely absorbed in the little lives he is striving to understand.

I reached this haven of rest one year at the beginning of June, and settled myself in the comfortable old homestead where dwelt only the owner and his wife. For one whole month at least I could count upon idyllic days in exactly the sort of solitude I craved, — Nature, birds, freedom from people, yet with the comforts of a home about me.

> "And here, like roses to the sun,
> My bright days opened one by one."

My way to the woods was through the orchard, then in the full glory of blossoms. I always passed that fragrant entrance to the world of spruces as unobtrusively as possible, to avoid arousing the interest or awakening the suspicion of the robin or song-

sparrow to be found there, for either of these dear, troublesome birds can spoil the study of a whole day. Let him once take it into his obstinate little head that one is too much interested in the ways of birds, and therefore, from his point of view, dangerous, and he never tires of proclaiming the fact with loud insistent voice to whom it may concern. All birds understand and hasten to conceal themselves, while carefully keeping the suspected under observation. It is hopeless to try to tire out a robin who has set out to mob one, for one bird will relieve another at the work, and to reduce them to silence would be to exhaust the whole robin population.

Swiftly and silently, then, from the orchard I entered what might, from its prevailing inhabitants, be called a Redstart Nook. It was a spot perhaps one hundred feet square, filled with old spruces surrounded by the rising generation, making ready to take their places in the world. The ground was fairly covered with young trees, from infants of two or three inches with top twig already pointed straight up the way it intended to go, to the tall old patriarch far above one's

head. Here were little groups of a dozen or more, not one two feet high, and many of them still wearing their yellow baby-caps, though the twigs were several inches long; there a squad of older ones like a party of school-children, and so on through the different sizes up to the aged and infirm, black and ragged, and heavily draped with long gray moss. Two or three, indeed, had lost their hold on Mother Earth and in some winter storm had bowed before the blast, and now lay prone among their young descendants. There were dozens ready to take their places, and if man does not interfere, there is no danger that the spruce family will die out in that place.

The grove was carpeted with its own dead leaves, through which had pushed their way little clumps of bunchberry with innocent white faces turned up to the sky, more delicate star-flowers, and the Canada mayflower, with shining green leaves and torch-like bloom, while just outside in the sunlight were little patches of white violets.

This was the home of those bewitching, elusive, fascinating fellow creatures, the

warblers, who make the life of the bird-student at the same time an ecstasy and a despair.

In all the years that I have known birds I have carefully avoided becoming interested in these bewildering atoms, so tantalizing to study. But here, without intention on my part, fate had ushered me into their native haunts. "He strives in vain who strives with fate." After one protest I succumbed to their charms.

The first who attracted my attention was a beauty, like most of his remarkable family, having a bright yellow head, set off by broad black bands beginning at the throat and running far down the sides, and he bore the awkward and undeserved name "black-throated green warbler." A charming and famous singer is this midget in black and gold who —

> "Trills a wild and wondrous note,
> The sweetest sound that ever stirred
> A warbler's throat."

And not only the sweetest, but the most unique, and, what is not generally known, the most varied. The song that has been

oftenest noticed, and is considered characteristic of the species, is sometimes syllabled as "Trees, trees, beautiful trees," sometimes as "Hear me, Saint Theresa"; but in my intimate acquaintance with some of the family in this nook alone, I have noted down eight distinctly different melodies. One special little neighbor who spent hours every day in a particular old spruce, sang the regulation song of his tribe, but he also indulged in at least one other totally unlike that. These two I have heard and seen him sing, one directly after the other, but he may have had half a dozen arrangements of his sweet notes. Moreover, though the song of this bird may be deliberate and drawled out in an aristocratic way, he is himself just as jerky and restless and plebeian in manner as any of them, — he has not a shadow of repose.

Sometimes the mate — as I suppose — of my bird, whom I soon learned to recognize, appeared on the family tree, going over the branches in a business-like way, and the only note I heard from her was a loud, sharp "chip."

In warbler-land one soon learns when a

rapidly moving line crosses his vision to follow it instantly, in the hope that it will materialize on the next tree in the shape of a bird. The usual mode of progression in this remarkable family is a series of flashes in the air, streaks across the landscape, and one must be very alert to see even so much as that. Ordinarily the first intimation of the presence of a new warbler is a new song, a baffling, elusive strain that cannot be placed, that the eager student knows will end abruptly, perhaps before he can see the rustle of a leaf or the sway of a twig. Sometimes he will be so happy as to turn his eyes at once upon the little creature bustling about among the leaves and twigs, and if his lucky star is in the ascendant he may be able to note some conspicuous feature by which the midget may be identified. For happily warblers are so strikingly marked that one can recognize at a glance the brilliant orange of the Blackburnian's throat, the eccentric yellow patches of the myrtle, or the showy necklace of the Canadian. If they were in the dull dress of vireos, or the undecided mixture of sparrow garb, one

could never "name the bird without a gun," and that would put them forever beyond the acquaintance of a bird-lover.

One morning I sat in the nook, admiring, as many times before, the beautiful effects of light and shade among the spruces, made by the slanting beams of the sun, not yet very high, when suddenly there broke out in the old spruce before me a great clatter of "ticket! ticket!" in the voice of the nest. I snatched my glass and turned it at once upon a much excited warbler, my black-throated green. He was hopping about in a way unusual even with him, and from every side came the thread-like cries, while the swaying of twigs pointed out a whole family of little folk, scrambling about in warbler fashion, and vociferously calling, like bigger bird-babies, for food. They were evidently just out of the nest, and then I studied my spruce-tree bird in a new rôle, — the father of a family.

He was charming in that as in every other, and he was plainly a "good provider," for I often saw him after that day, going about in great anxiety, looking here and

there and everywhere, while a small green worm in the beak told plainly enough it was his wandering offspring he sought. Under the pressure of family cares, and harassed by the incessant cries of the youngsters, he remained, I was pleased to see, the same sweet-tempered darling, and whenever there came a lull in his hard work, he poured out his cheery song as enchantingly as ever.

During the remainder of the month I frequently saw and more frequently heard the little family as they followed their busy parents around on neighboring trees. One day I noted the singer flitting about the top of the spruce, singing most joyously, and almost as constantly as before the advent of the nestlings, while the mother was hurrying over the lower branches of the same tree collecting food for one infant. Suddenly the song ceased, and almost instantly the tiny papa joined the family below, and addressed himself with his usual energy to the business of filling that greedy mouth. Over and under and around and between and through the branches he rushed, every few seconds returning to stuff a morsel into the always

hungry mouth, till he actually reduced that bantling to silence, and then he slipped away, returned to his tree-top, and resumed his lovely "tee-tee-twe-e-e-tum."

Somewhat later I heard the young black-throats at their practice, droll, quavering little attempts to imitate the musical, incisive song of their father. They soon mastered the notes, but the spirit was as yet far beyond them.

Other baby-cries were all about, for these were hungry days. Juncoes in their light brown suits and delicate spotted bibs, and chickadees in the dress of their elders shouted and called from the old spruce, and always over all "the gossip of swallows filled the air," barn-swallow babies with their squeaky calls, tree-swallows with their louder two-note cries, and the parents of both species teaching, encouraging, and feeding on the wing, preparing their little families for the long journey so soon to be taken.

This happy life went on till almost at the end of July a heavy fog swept in one evening from the ocean, and when the next day

a cool north wind blew it away, it seemed to take the whole tribe of warblers with it. No more did the black-throat appear on the spruce, gone were the bustling and scrambling little ones, and ended the sweet beguiling songs.

A new set was heard in the nook, — the rapid chitter of the downy woodpecker, the whispers of cedar-birds, the rattle of the grasshopper who goes clacking about as if his internal machinery were out of order, and lastly, alas! the ear-piercing song of the locust, which proclaimed in tones no one could mistake that August was on the threshold.

THE WILES OF A WARBLER

It is to be out under the free heaven, hand in hand with the wild things that hate a roof and die in a cage, playing truant from civilization with the warm-hearted earth.

LE GALLIENNE.

VI

THE WILES OF A WARBLER

One morning soon after reaching the pleasant nook described in the preceding chapter, with its delicious odors of the woods, I was greeted by an unfamiliar note. It was the inconsequent song of a warbler, but neither the jerked-out carol of the redstart, nor the aristocratic drawl of the black-throated green. It was in a hoarse or husky tone, a short, sharp "zee-zee-zee-zip!" the last note higher and snapped off.

I hastened to get my glass upon the stranger, when I found him a beauty in blue and white, a parula warbler, the first I had ever seen. He stayed but a few minutes, and I turned again to watch the redstart family: the little singer in gorgeous coat, as conspicuous as a spark of fire in the dark, and his mate hardly less gay in bright yellow and brown. She was at the moment making her way up an old spruce-tree, flying and

hopping daintily from step to step of the ladder left by fallen branches. Round and round the trunk she went, now this side, now that, tail wide spread and showing the great yellow patch upon the brown, her tiny body all life and animation and never pausing for one second.

Suddenly there burst out on one side a perfect fusillade of "smacks" delivered with an energy that instantly aroused me, and I turned hastily. There on a battered old tree, one of the outposts of the woods, appeared a very much excited individual about as big as one's thumb. She was hopping in jerky warbler fashion over the lower branches and evidently addressing me, protesting anxiously, no doubt, against my presence in her vicinity. While I looked, noticing the yellow throat and breast, and trying to get further indications of her identity, she slipped behind a tuft of moss — and was silent.

"Ah, a nest!" I thought, and she must be that moss-loving warbler, the parula, perhaps the mate of the one I had seen.

Redstart affairs faded into insignificance. I could see redstarts any day. I turned my

seat to face the stranger. Fifteen or twenty minutes of closest attention, with eyes glued to that tuft of moss, dragged slowly by before the shy birdling appeared for half a second, darting away like a flash of light.

Having spent several years among the moss-hung trees on the Maine coast, I had many times looked for the nest of this bird, whose chosen home it is. Hours at a time I had passed with eyes fixed upon some tall, heavily draped tree, showing a hundred desirable nesting-places, but never a sign of life had I seen. And at this tree I should never have thought of looking, for it had but one small bunch of moss, and that on its lower branch. Perhaps it was chosen because it was a living branch. Possibly the bird is wise enough not to build on a dead tree.

The quantity of usnea in these woods was wonderful. The oldest trees were fairly fringed with it, from root to top twig, and one might often see half a dozen in a group together stone dead and swathed in the gray moss like a winding-sheet. Young trees also, strong and vigorous, some even less than a foot high, had here and there a bit of this

strange plant which looked as if it had fallen there. But on trying to take it off, it seemed to cling with claws of steel, and was torn before it could be removed. It had already fastened itself for life.

That my coy little moss-dweller was a parula I felt sure; it was only necessary to identify her positively. That sounds like an easy task, and so I expected to find it, but it required days of hard work, of patient, tireless watching to accomplish. The breast of the bird was all I could see distinctly, for the nest was fifteen feet from the ground, but that lacked the band across which is usually to be found on the parula, or if there it was so faint in color that I could not see it in the hasty glimpses I could get.

I was particularly careful about identification, because when she stood half in the nest she looked purely black and white mottled, the effect on her white sides and dark back of the shade of the mossy veil behind which she stood. One needs always to see in more than one light, when identification is doubtful. The bird had to go behind a veil

every time she went into her nest, but she did it so deftly and daintily that this delicate portière was at the end as fresh as when she began to use it.

Determined to solve my puzzle, and in my own way, without disturbing her, I settled myself to watching that baby-house in the moss. Hours every day I spent with eyes fixed upon it. And this literally, for the movements of the over-modest owner were so silent and so rapid that it was only thus I could be sure of seeing her.

It may seem strange that a person accustomed to studying birds, and familiar with their ways, could not easily identify one who passed in and out before her eyes fifty times a day. But her movements were so irregular I could not calculate on them. She shot out of her nest as if sent from a catapult, plunging instantly into the thickest group of young trees, while she returned in silence, flitting like a shadow without a sound, from which side I could never discover. Even after she began to feed her nestlings, which she did in a day or two, she still managed to avoid giving me a satisfactory view.

From the position of the nest I should have been certain it was the work and the home of a parula warbler but for one remarkable circumstance. The tree was claimed and guarded by a redstart, while never once, except for a moment, and on another tree, on that first morning, was a male parula seen or heard in the neighborhood.

The redstart who caused this complication spent nearly all his time on the nest-tree in silence, and a redstart silent is a redstart with important business in hand. He watched me constantly, drove off strange birds who alighted on the branches, and though he did not actually go to the nest, he showed his anxiety and concern every moment.

I should not have been disturbed about the absence of the male parula, that is, I should not think that conclusive as to the identity, although I knew of a nest of a parula about which the male was most attentive, bringing food and hovering around his sitting mate devotedly. For birds differ in their domestic, as in their other habits. Besides, have we not the example of the ruby-throat to prove that some males are conspicuous by their absence

at this important time? It has been thought that these absentees have no interest and no knowledge of nest affairs, but doubt is thrown on this conclusion by the fact observed by Mabel Osgood Wright, that when a mother humming-bird was accidentally killed, the father at once appeared and took tender care of the little family.

I tried to make my glimpses of the nesting-bird suit my knowledge of the female redstart, but in vain. If she belonged to that family she differed from any redstart I had seen. As I know her, this special little dame is always on dress parade, all airs and graces, scrambling madly about, not afraid of being seen, and in every way different from the elusive little owner of that nest.

Moreover, who ever heard of a bird of that species building in, or even behind, a tuft of hanging moss? Yet it is just as unprecedented that a bird should claim a tree and nest not his own, and early in the study I had satisfied myself that there was no second nest on that tree. But then again, where was the mate of the nesting-bird, if the redstart were not he? I was completely baffled for

several days, and I had almost begun to entertain the idea of the redstart's proprietorship and to wonder if this could be a progressive, "end-of-the-century" affair, or if the redstart had "married out of meeting," as the Friends say — not very seriously, however.

Here once more I had opportunity to reflect how wise are the birds not to disturb their surroundings. Scarcely ever does any litter of discarded material or any disarranging of branches or leaves proclaim their presence. They slip in and select a place, leaving everything exactly as Nature has arranged it, and when they are sitting or absent after food there is nothing to betray the bird's secret. One day while I was watching this warbler nursery, three or four people came along, and I feared that seeing me they would look for birds. Then I noticed how perfectly solitary the bower of the unknown was left. There was absolutely nothing to point out the home of the little family. The tuft of moss which hid it was not nearly so thick as many others; its long veil swung idly in the wind, the picture of

desolation. One would never dream that it was occupied.

How different our way! We cannot put up even a tent without changing the whole neighborhood, beginning at once to deface and destroy. Nay, we cannot even walk through the woods without leaving it strewn with our wreckage,—flowers plucked and left to die, twigs snapped off from pure thoughtlessness, leaves carelessly picked and scattered far and wide. Some of us, indeed, have not outgrown the vandalism of marking our path through the beautiful works of Nature with paper bags and tin cans. It seems impossible for a human being — except perhaps an American Indian — to pass along any part of the earth's surface without marring or defacing it.

It is no matter of surprise that some people complain they never see the interesting things that others do. It is simply because they make themselves so obvious in their usual noisy progress through the woods. They are heard a long way off, and every bird silently withdraws, the spirit of the woods retreats to its deepest fastnesses; "The very trees

would run away if they could," says John Muir.

It is interesting to see how our little neighbors have learned to understand us. Birds near houses know exactly how to take the average person who goes laughing and talking or hurrying by, seeing nothing and hearing nothing. They go right on about their business, and sing and call and carry on their domestic concerns as if the blind and deaf person down below, did not exist. But the individual who goes quietly, stops and looks at them, shows interest in their doings — that is a new variety and must be watched. They are at once on guard, become shy, and try to slip out of sight.

I had watched and puzzled over affairs in the moss for several days before my doubts were set at rest by the appearance of the rightful lord and master, eager and busy enough to atone for his strange desertion of his family. On my approach to the tree I saw him, an undoubted parula warbler, making up for lost time by feeding the nestlings industriously. Every few minutes he appeared with mouth full of goodies, a tiny

worm dangling from his beak, or small wings sticking out each side, suggestive of dainties within.

He was awkward in getting to the family, looking this side and that before he saw just how to reach them, and sometimes going in from the back, which the mother never did.

The parulas never concerned themselves about birds who alighted on their tree, — all the feathered neighborhood were welcome to use it as a perch.

I could not rest until I had settled the question of the redstart's extraordinary conduct. I instituted a close search in the surrounding trees, and I found, directly behind the one I had been watching, another tree with a nest, about which a female redstart scrambled and rushed — redstart fashion. That explained and excused the behavior of her mate. He could not keep in sight of me from his own tree, so he established his watch-tower on the next one.

Nine days after the discovery of the parula quarters, and six — or perhaps eight — after feeding began, the little family took flight one morning before I arrived on the

scene, and a chorus of fine thread-like "pip's" came down to me from the roof of the nook. I suppose they were parula baby-cries, but when warblers take their young folk into the tops of tall spruces, they are as much lost as if they had gone into the next state, and I sought them no more.

In a day or two I procured a ladder and saw, and a man to use them, and had the branch sawed off and the nest brought down. It was so frail I wondered it could have held little birds. But it was a typical parula structure, merely the strands of moss drawn together to form a cradle, the whole of one side left open almost to the very bottom, so that it was marvelous that eggs or young had not fallen out. There was not a particle of lining of any sort, and the whole was as dainty and fresh as if no living creature had ever entered it. The bunch of moss was not more than six or seven inches long, of a beautiful sage-green color, and it hung from a dead twig smaller than an ordinary lead-pencil.

"All our endeavors or wit cannot so much as reach to represent the nest of the least

birdlet, its contexture, beautie, profit and use, no, nor the nest of a seely spider," says Montaigne.

In another part of the island, a year or two later, another parula nest was taken. It was quite different from mine, being as deep as a vireo's nest, and the strands of moss woven together to form a solid bottom almost as firm as the Baltimore oriole's nest, though with no lining. The study differed also in another respect: the birds were not at all shy, and the male took his full share of feeding.

This nest was closely watched by an enthusiastic bird-student, who had the pleasure of seeing the youngsters make their exit from the home cradle. The mother — as she reports — coaxed the first nestling to try its wings by alighting on the branch and calling again and again, then feeding the little one who stood lingering on the brink. When, after some time, this one flew, the mother departed with it, and the father took his turn with the last nestling. He fed and called, making short flights about the tree, and at last executed a peculiar movement, which

could be interpreted only as an object-lesson to the hesitating birdlet in the doorway. He — who had always been seen to fly like a flash — flew from the tree to the ground very slowly, with wings and tail wide spread, and stood there, waving his wings. The watching youngster waved his also, and at last he flew.

Mrs. Slosson tells in "Bird Lore" a charming story of the attachment of a parula warbler, who, having been stunned by flying against a window, was taken in, revived, and fed upon flies. He attached himself to her in the most loving and fearless way, and refused to leave her when out of doors and perfectly free. At last, when she was obliged to go away from him, she had to deceive him and slip away when he did not see her. Another proof of the friendliness of birds to us if we would only show a like feeling to them.

A few days after the farewell of the parula family I came upon an exciting scene with the redstarts in the next tree, — the young just making their first appearance outside their cradle. There were as many minds about

the way in which to make their début as there were babies to go; in fact, I long ago discovered that many of these little folk come out of the egg with their minds made up. Papa redstart was distracted trying to keep them together, and went into a panic at my approach, so I took pity on him and left him to manage his unruly family by himself.

The study of warblers — as before noted — is the most fascinating and at the same time distracting and altogether exasperating of bird-study. So small, so restless, so rapid in movement; one moment alighting on a twig like a feather, then darting — a mere flash of color — over one's head; now pausing to utter the song, then instantly diving behind a leaf; now hovering daintily a fraction of a second to snatch some infinitesimal atom, then scrambling over the branches in frantic haste, and all the time preferring the tops of the trees for their evolutions. It is impossible to regard them as anything more than frolicsome youngsters, and their small size encourages the feeling. To see a pair of fussy fluttering warblers in charge

of a squad of short-tailed little folk is one of the delectable sights of bird-land.

Not only does warbler study require a good stock of patience, but to prosecute it successfully needs a very amiable disposition or a tough skin, for besides the disadvantages mentioned, the woods they love are also the home of mosquitoes, ants, gnats, and other torments. If the birds had not — fortunately — the habit of introducing themselves by their jerky little songs, we should scarcely ever know they were about.

These small fellow creatures too have that eternal vigilance which the old saying assures us is the price of liberty. However busy they appear to be with their own affairs, they always have an eye to spare for the student; perhaps that is one of the advantages of eyes looking both ways. Let us not forget that all this energy, this fury of work, is for our benefit, for they are the most indefatigable of workers, destroying every second, between their snatchy songs, insect eggs, and insects which are doing their little best, and no insignificant best either, to destroy our trees.

Nor do these small helpers lack spirit, tiny though they are. I know of one, a captive in the room with several birds of much larger size, who simply made himself autocrat of the party. He took possession of the biggest bathing-dish, selected for his own the most desirable food-cup, and drove away any thrush, catbird, or robin who presumed to dispute his claims. He was a black-poll warbler, not much longer than one's thumb.

In August, what with the plumage of the young and the moulting of the old birds, the student who persists in his attentions to these fairy-like creatures may expect to go mad. The young are queer, the elders like bundles of rags, and the variety of plumage resulting is bewildering in the extreme. Moreover, the birds do not act like themselves, and they seem to have totally lost their cheery voices. It is safest to abandon the pursuit until they have all settled the question of costume.

When the month is over, when

> "September brings the goldenrod,
> And maples burn like fire," —

the woods are still beautiful, but the summer

people are gone from their old haunts. The gay little party who made the tree-tops lively all summer, who lived their joyous yet hard-working lives among the spruces, and cheered us with their tuneful voices, have disappeared, and the "upper stories" are deserted.

> "O happy life, to soar and sway,
> Above the life by mortals led,
> And when the Autumn comes to flee
> Wherever sunshine beckons thee."

FLYCATCHER VAGARIES

Nature like a mother calleth us to herself. Her touch giveth strength. She hath rest for our weariness, taketh our burdens if we will but give them up. She bringeth darkness only as a mantle about us that she may give her beloved sleep.

H. M. Alden.

VII

FLYCATCHER VAGARIES

Beyond the scene of the little parula drama, farther into the woods, was a remainder of the ancient forest which had somehow escaped the axe, — a group of tall, battered old spruces reaching far up towards the sky, with no branches until near the top, and no undergrowth whatever.

As you approach this wood through the old road, birds scatter hurriedly across the open as if all must get safely home before you reach them, making you feel yourself a monster intruding upon their sacred solitude. As you go on you hear low whispered notes of warning that hardly break the silence, but proclaim as well as a shout that you are discovered and everybody on guard. You shall see but a fluttering leaf, a flitting wing, or a swaying twig, and you know the woods are peopled with the witching folk named warblers, and that you are under surveillance from all sides.

The old grove was to me a daily joy. When I parted the thick branches at the entrance and passed in, it impressed me like a grand cathedral. The floor was carpeted with the rich brown of fallen needles, and the whole shut in by the trees on the borders retaining their branches down to the ground, in addition to the thick screen of greenery with which Mother Nature loves to hedge in her groves. Within that magic inclosure all the lower branches had dropped off, and only those at the top where they reached the sunlight lived, and formed a roof. It was a great temple with innumerable pillars.

> "A temple enchanted and hallowed of old,
> And its priests are the fir-trees so solemnly stoled,
> Ever shedding their sweet benedictions of peace
> On the soul that here seeketh in Nature release."

The grove was most lovely in the morning, when the sun shone in from the side and mottled the moss-clad trunks with sunshine, giving it a strange, foreign look, quite unlike that of a few hours later, when the sun was higher and all was in shadow.

For true enjoyment of the woods — as already said — silence and solitude are in-

dispensable. You steal in, just within the green walls, quietly, disturbing nothing, taking a seat in reverent silence and remaining so. In a few moments life goes on as before, and you begin to feel the spirit of the woods. A certain awe creeps over you: you could not break the silence with your voice; you dread to snap a twig, or make the human presence felt in any way. You feel that you could sit there forever but for this pampered human body which in spite of all the philosophy you can muster, in spite of Emerson's comforting verse, —

> "For who defends our leafy tabernacles
> From bold intrusions of the traveling crowd,
> Who but the midge, mosquito, and the fly,
> Which past endurance sting the tender cit," —

which you know is true, — will resent the onslaughts of mosquitoes and ants, rebel at an uncomfortable seat, and insists upon some unattainable thing for its ease. So that after a few hours only you are forced to drag yourself away from your Elysium and return to human dwellings. If one could only free oneself from these imperative demands of the flesh, what bliss, what inspira-

tion one might find with Nature in her woods alone.

Here and there the fresh green curtains of the grove appear to open into lanes of alluring promise, showing vistas which might lead to any wonderland. It was through one of these as through a familiar highway that the cuckoo on wings of silence took his way, —

"For the cuckoo delights in the cool leafy shadows,
Where the nest and its treasures are rocked in the breeze."

It seemed that one had simply to follow the bird to reach his hidden home. But alas! what is beautiful and every way delightful to him with wings, is far different to the humble plodder on foot. Pitfalls strew the path; fallen branches, deep holes where once a tree had stood, and rocks that thrust themselves into the way, make it impossible.

It was like the wily warblers to select such a bit of woods for their haunts. The sun touching every prominent point with light, confuses things so that one could not see them if there were forty warblers right before him, and anyway it is no trouble for a bird to hide when one leaf is ample screen.

One year this grove and the woods about was the scene of a remarkable visitation of butterflies. They were nearly all of one species, the common large reddish one called the Monarch, or tawny-orange butterfly, I believe. When it was still, the air was simply full of them, silent, mysterious, wafted along by the light summer air without apparent effort of their own, like tiny boats with gay sails spread, floating in the air. But every day about half-past ten a stronger breeze sprang up, and in a few minutes the whole fleet had disappeared, not a butterfly to be seen. In the old grove they had taken refuge, and there they collected by thousands, settling themselves as if to sleep, in crowds, close together. They appeared to have a choice in situations. Some branches were entirely covered, while others next to them were empty.

One small tree was a particular favorite with the butterflies, being literally hidden by the masses, while more kept trying to join them. As soon as a party of them were settled they folded their wings together over the back, showing only the dull lining, but when another straggler attempted to

alight among them, all the wings flew wide open, showing the brighter colors, and looking as if the tree had suddenly burst into bloom.

The most pleasing study offered by the old grove was of two flycatchers, and while warbler notes and warbler forms are filling the air, it is a wonderful relief to turn to birds who will not go into mad panics, or flit before your eyes like a vision, but will stand calmly while you turn your glass on them and take a good look.

Near the house I had seen the alder or Traill's flycatcher, and noted his call in the hoarse tone of the familiar phœbe, and delivered in the same way, yet sufficiently unlike to make one wish to see the author. His repose of manner made him a welcome change from the restless warblers. He would sometimes remain in sight for hours without seeming to tire or to want food.

The song came at first from a group of alders, and there I saw the bird, a small, trim, darkly-clad figure, on a shrub or low tree, sitting upright, flycatcher fashion, uttering his song with military precision, and

staring at me with the imperturbable calmness characteristic of the family. Later he took to the tall trees, and through July I learned to know him well, for he was one of our most common visitors.

I enjoyed him especially in that old grove, where, my seat being particularly well concealed, I was much nearer to him. I soon found out that he, no more than other birds, is confined to the conventional utterance by which he is known. He was most voluble and interesting, being unaware that he was under observation and at the mercy of a reporter. His common, official song, which voiced itself to me as "red-dy," he jerked out with apparent difficulty, as his relative, the least flycatcher, does his well-known "chebec," throwing his head back as if he would snap it off.

He often sang this common song an hour at a time. But again he added another two-syllable clause much lower in tone, and of a musical quality entirely lacking to the loud, hoarse "red-dy." This second part sounded like "per-ry." It was so different in tone and manner that it seemed like the note of

another bird, and until I saw him utter it I was not sure it was his.

The continued song of the alder flycatcher was most attractive. He generally opened with a loud, strident "whee-o!" several times repeated, as if to compel the attention of his audience. Then, after treating the world to his well-known call, and later adding the second clause, he would take a lower tone and utter a plaintive "qu! qu! qu! qu-eu!" suggestive of trouble or anxiety, and from that go on through his repertoire. He was extremely versatile, indulging in many other and different notes, some of which can neither be described, nor imitated by the human voice, and nearly all in an undertone. These he would deliver in a variety of ways, and thus make peculiar, even droll combinations, which he appeared to enjoy exceedingly, keeping it up an hour at a time.

The nest of this bird is interesting. One lies before me now. It is made of fine spruce twigs containing bunches of usnea, and inside of fine grasses and a very few horsehairs. It is placed, most curiously, not on

the half-inch spruce branch under it, but on a dense mass of dead twigs spreading in close network in every direction, which hold it at least an inch above the branch, making a charming airy foundation for the structure.

The books say the alder flycatcher stays in the alders. In the first of the season the one I watched did so, and I think the nest was there, but later he sang most often from the top of the firs. He was a fair-weather bird, — this individual, I mean, for he, no more than others, is a facsimile of his tribe. This individual flycatcher, then, never sang in rain or high wind, nor even in an ocean fog. Sometimes I would not hear or see him for two days.

The other flycatcher of the old grove — the olive-sided — was more shy. He would utter his "quick! see-here!" from the top spire of the tallest "pointed fir" in the group, an hour at a time, and care not how many saw and heard him, but before he indulged in his many lower, quaint, and conversational notes he must be sure no one was in sight. I heard him from my sheltered

seat at the entrance to the grove, and when out of my range of vision. I knew him from the frequent interpolation of the conventional call, by which he proclaimed his identity — his passport, one may say.

He uttered various notes and calls, some warlike, some tender, some almost a squeal, some even mournful, nearly all eccentric. Very curious was a sort of murmur, like "m-m-m," which seemed to be a greeting to another, beginning very low, then swelling till quite loud, and again diminishing.

One evening when I was sitting on the piazza of the cottage, an olive-sided flycatcher flew over the house singing at the top of his voice, "see-here! tu! tu!" and repeating it rapidly, which was a marked departure from his usual dignity.

The flycatchers that I know have always a great deal of dignity and tranquillity of manner. They never show the flightiness of a warbler, nor the restlessness of a swallow. Some of them will sit hour after hour, upright, darting after an insect occasionally, it is true, but always in a business-like way that does not seem to detract from their

appearance of perfect leisure. Some of them are rather autocratic in their claims to a neighborhood, but they make up for it by their willingness to earn the place by vigilant care of it, and besides, who has a better right?

One flycatcher was absent here, and I did not regret him, for he is very much in evidence almost everywhere, and is an autocrat wherever found. This is the least flycatcher, and when I hear his jerky "chebec," I know I shall see few other birds.

A pair of kingbirds had a nest in the orchard, and that I am always glad to see, for I have high respect for the kingbird. His manners are reserved and show common sense. He does not go into foolish panics, nor consider it his business to dictate to the neighborhood, as does the robin, for example. He also has sense to discriminate between one with evil intentions and a harmless gazer at the nest. In all my study of kingbirds' nests I have never met with discourtesy from one.

With the advent of August came a change over the old grove. First sounded the toy-

trumpet squeak of the red-breasted nuthatch, advance guard of the migrants, and if very near and very attentive, one might hear his queer little whining or squeaky whispering to his fellows, as he scrambled over the trees, searching under as well as over twigs, and hanging head down most of the time.

Warbler baby-cries abounded, but their elders had fallen to silence. On entering the grove I could sometimes see that the tree-tops were full of flitting wings, but not a sound floated down to me. Not only were the birds putting off their old garments, and putting on the new, they were also giving the final touches to the education of the young, —

> "Teaching sky science and wings' delight," —

and all the time preparing, — preparing for the great event of the Autumn migration.

> "Already the cricket is busy
> With hints of soberer days,
> And the goldenrod lights slowly
> Its torch for the Autumn blaze."

A SWALLOW-WOOING

"Bloom of blossoms and joy of birds —
What in the world is better than these?"

VIII

A SWALLOW-WOOING

AFTER hours of study in the woods, I passed the long twilight on the piazza, where I had a feast of daisies. Of these flowers I never tired. In a light breeze they looked all alive, as if nodding and laughing together like a party of jolly children. When the wind died away, all were perfectly still, then a ripple would start one side, go on to the neighbors, who began to stir, and in ten seconds the whole field would be laughing and nodding in glee, always reminding me of Wordsworth's daffodils, —

> "Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
> Tossing their heads in sprightly dance."

Later, when daisies had dropped their white draperies and stood silent, with dull yellow heads, in the place which late they had glorified, wild roses took their place and beautified the ground, while concealed among the tall grass grew the most wonder-

ful clover, the utmost possibilities of that humble plant, — stems more than a foot long with great red globes an inch and a quarter in diameter, of several shades of color. A handful of them made a rich and truly beautiful bouquet; and in lower spots among the rocks, white clover like small snowballs, perfect as they, swinging lightly on their foot-long stems.

Beyond this intervale was a rocky ledge crowned with a belt of "pointed firs" that hid the ocean, —

> "Where land and sea touch hand, and greet."

On the right side was first a dwarf pear-tree, on which, sooner or later, alighted every bird of the neighborhood; farther on, a ledge where blackberries flourished, and a hidden swampy nook where yellow loose-strife and tall meadow-rue were found, and beyond all a bit of the sea, with "Half-Way Light" flashing its red and white at night. On the left were more evergreens, with here and there a roof, and the road to the village.

Seated there in comfortable easy-chair I watched the strangers who used the old pear-

tree as a rest-station between the woods each side; saw the robins and song-sparrows who foraged on the close-cut grass about the house; studied the varied wonderful effects of cloud and ocean; watched the reflection in the east of the sunset, sometimes more beautiful than the original in the west, and at all times the swallows, who, as Michelet says, "sing little, but talk much."

Swallows were constantly flying about over the grass in their graceful way, making every other bird-flight appear stiff and clumsy, chirruping and calling socially to one another, perfectly willing — as it appeared — that all the world should hear what they have to say.

Now and then several of them would collect on the ground, in a path free from grass, chattering at the top of their sweet voices, occasionally picking at the earth as if eating something, but in general simply talking, moving about this way and that without apparent object, and ludicrously suggesting that human gathering known as a "tea."

I have long known the fondness of these birds for a joke, and here I received fresh

proofs of it. While I was one evening watching a party circling about over the lawn as usual, a bird left the group and swooped down at a solemn robin pursuing his food-hunt on the lawn and in no way interfering with the swallow. The robin flew up with indignant outcry, ready to fight, but the aggressor "flit in his glee."

Again, some hens were turned out into a field over which these birds were flying. At once the swallows began dashing down at the hens, almost touching them, and making them dodge and run. They did not cease till the hens retired to a rocky ledge, when the swallows resumed their sailing over the meadow. Swallows also came down threateningly at a kingbird, but though he dodged, he did not go, and they did not repeat it.

It was a common thing to see them mob the cat, and they did it so successfully, sweeping down one after another in close succession and so near her that she was glad to run and hide.

Once, in another place, I saw them drive a kingfisher from a fence-post where he had established himself to watch the water below.

They attacked him so energetically that two or three times he lost his balance and would have fallen but for wings. At last he departed, when some young swallows came to the fence and the parents went to feeding. The kingfisher had been too near to please them.

It was charming to see the swallows bathe. One would skim along just over the water, as a flat stone thrown by a skillful hand will "skip," now and then touching the water. After two or three of these dainty dips, he would describe a large circle in the air, then return and dip two or three times more, repeating this two or three times before he would alight and dress his plumage.

The summer of this story I had still further insight into swallow idiosyncrasies — I saw a swallow-wooing, and a case of conjugal discipline edifying to behold. For some reason which I could not discover a pair of barn-swallows began to frequent the beam supporting the roof of the piazza where I sat.

The lawn in front — as I have said — was common hunting-ground for a large

party of swallows, but they had never been in the habit of coming under the piazza roof. The ends of the rafters divided the supporting beam into spaces of fifteen to eighteen inches. These cozy nooks seemed to strike the two birds as very attractive, and here they came for their love-making early in June, for it was a late season in that cool island off the coast of Maine.

The courtship of the barn-swallow appears to be conducted in the "good old-fashioned way." The little swain goes down on his knees, as it were, certainly as nearly as possible with his anatomy. This bird took the most humble position in the presence of the "beloved object," often with his head thrust into the corner like a "naughty boy" under punishment. He held head and tail depressed, and altogether looked as if he were trying to sink through the floor. In this attitude he sometimes uttered his song, but more frequently a sort of "b-r-r," loud and long continued. Sometimes he moved about, turning round and round like a top, or running with mincing steps across his narrow floor between the rafters.

Meantime the damsel did n't approve in the least of the demonstrations in her honor, for she flew at him with a sharp "phit!" Usually he vanished before her wrath, but if he lingered, she hurried him with a touch of her beak. Occasionally she flew away in the midst of his rhapsody as if to show her disdain, upon which he changed his tone, uttered some low conversational notes in a plaintive tone, or became silent.

The birds were so absorbed in their own affairs that they did not usually notice me, sitting, of course, perfectly silent there. Once the bride-elect flew almost in my face, and fairly screamed at me. But I attributed that to nervous excitement, for she was greatly disturbed. At another time she came and looked over at me in a most expressive way, as if to say, "Did you ever see such a silly performance? What would you do with such a fellow?" and then she turned on him with fury in her eye.

Sometimes she would not endure the antics of her lover for a second, and again she would be patient, perhaps a minute, but all the time restless and growing more and more

fidgety, till at last she flew furiously at him, and he disappeared before her.

Once there was a droll little scene. They were on opposite sides of the same rafter, the rafter between them, of course. He sidled close up to his side, drew himself down, and was still. He could hardly be seen. After a while he thrust his head forward and peeked around at her, upon which both flew.

Sometimes she came alone and spent a long time dressing the old-gold satin plumage of her breast with its dark necklace.

Matters progressed in this way for a day or two, and I could not see that the bride was any nearer being won, when the wooer suddenly adopted new tactics: he brought the temptation of earthly possessions to bear upon the obdurate fair one — he began to build a house. He chose a certain corner on the beam, and, the first I knew, came with a great mouthful of mud, which he carefully placed and worked over with his beak for some seconds, using great effort, with his whole body jerking.

His "lady-love" did not appear, nor seem to notice what he was doing for some time,

but when she did, she fairly raged. Catching him as he appeared with a mouthful, she flew at him and compelled him to leave before he had time to deposit his load. She chased him round and round the lawn. But he held on to his precious mouthful, and returned at last to deposit it safely, and work it in with the rest.

This happened several times before she recognized that more vigilance was demanded, and began flying through very often to see if he were there. Finally she took to sitting on the beam to prevent his coming at all.

It was evident that the little madam was determined to put an end to his building in that place. Whether she thought he was premature and took too much for granted, or whether she preferred to set up housekeeping in the barn, where the rest of the little flock were building, so that she could have society, she did not make clear to me. Whatever the reason, she was resolved to have her own way, and she did, as in the bird-world is the mother's prerogative. She chased him every time he came, often till he dropped his load, and she finally discouraged him. He began

two nests, but did not get far with either, and at last they came no more. They doubtless settled in the barn and made part of the lively party ever circling over the grass and looking all alike to me.

Barn-swallows are greater singers than is usually appreciated, their voices being generally soft and low, though I have heard them sing as loud as a bobolink. Those about me in that corner of the world had very interesting songs. One would perch on the roof of an extension and give a long-continued song, twelve or fourteen notes, and constantly repeated, so that he kept it up several minutes at a time, before closing with the open-mouth explosive sound that usually ends it. Often I have surprised one perched on a dead tree singing away for dear life all alone, and one often sang as he flew over.

The barn-swallow is always a talkative bird, and his voice has a wonderfully human quality. A little party of three or four flying leisurely over, not on food intent, will often be chatting sociably together. Even when just out of the nest, the babies are great chatterers, and one whose ears are open to

bird-notes will hear their sweet squeaky voices everywhere.

A few weeks after the little idyll of June I had the good fortune to surprise a family party, and note the pretty family feeling. Two young ones sat on a fence as close together as they could get. The parents fed them there, hovering before the little pair in the daintiest way. When all had enough food and the parents wanted to rest, they alighted by the two youngsters, one each side and close to them, making a charming picture.

But the wise elders never forgot that baby swallows must take their regular wing-exercises, so now and then the two would circle around in the air, uttering peculiar cries, which seemed to inspire or excite the youngsters, for they took to their wings and tried to follow. They flew well, but soon tired and dropped to the fence, but far apart. Then it was pleasing to see both of them begin drawing nearer one another, running or creeping along in their pretty way till they were nestled side by side again.

The life of a nestling is most interesting.

Nothing is more charming to me than to watch them from the egg up, and see their pretty baby-ways. They are not all made on the same pattern. The robin baby is a masterful fellow, demanding to be fed and comforted, while the Baltimore oriole baby cries constantly in a hopeless, lost sort of a way for days after it has left the nest. The bluebird baby is a darling, with a little speckled bib and the sweetest of voices; the catbird baby is graceful and shy, but not a bit afraid of one; the redwing baby is fussy and restless, never staying two minutes in a place, while the wood-thrush baby will sit in one spot for an hour, waiting with thrush patience for breakfast; the cedar-bird baby is gentle and confiding, without fear of his human neighbors, and the young song-sparrow chirps like an insect for hours together. The droll little nuthatch mamma leads her young folk around in a flock as a hen does her chickens, and a busy time she has stuffing the hungry little mouths. Drollest of all are warbler babies, not much bigger than a walnut, yet restless and uneasy with the true warbler spirit. They seldom stay two seconds

in one spot, and the parent who has one to feed spends half her time hunting it up in a new place every time she comes. Swallow babies are very different. They stay in the nest — those I have watched — till they can fly well; for days they stand on the edge and try their powers by beating the wings, till, when at last they do venture, they reach the haven they start for without accident. In a short time after its first flight a little swallow will follow its parents out of doors and make short excursions in the air, and in a few days one can hardly tell the young from the old.

Says a thoughtful observer, — albeit a sportsman, — "The more the habits of any wild animals are known, the greater is our admiration called forth, for we see traits of character developed and intellectuality exhibited that are hidden from the superficial observer."

WITH THE SEA-LOVERS

BEHOLD the sea! —
The opaline, the plentiful and strong,
Yet beautiful as is the rose in June,
. . . .
Creating a sweet climate by its breath,
Washing out harms and griefs from memory.
EMERSON.

IX

WITH THE SEA-LOVERS

THE study of birds when nesting is over and the young are on the wing is very different from that of June. In nesting-time a bird is local in his habits. If one is seen in a certain place to-day, he will probably be seen there to-morrow; the interest and the cares of the nest keep him within limits. But after the young are out, all this is changed. If he is startled to-day, he is apt to remember it to-morrow and avoid that place. Hence a spot that is birdy one day may be quite deserted the next. So, late in the season, it is better to go in a different direction every day, if possible.

It was when summer was on the wane, therefore, that the bird-lover of these chronicles, emulating the wandering birds, enlarged the scope of her studies. Deserting the old grove, she betook herself to the shore, where, seated on its rocks, she could look over to-

ward the coast of Africa, or, as Burroughs felicitously puts it, "stand at the open door of the continent and drink in the breath of the morning of the world."

Here, beside the mysterious great deep, with its wonderful changing moods, presenting a fresh picture every day; with its marvelous silent life beneath the surface, and its winged lovers above; with the delicious freshness of its breath, and the soothing sound of its waves ever beating against the rocks; here, if anywhere, must one yield to Nature's absorbing and inspiring influence.

The daintiest sea-lover to present himself in that Beloved Island on the Coast of Maine is a sandpiper, "uttering his sweet and mournful song." His feeding-place is the shore, and his nest close by, somewhere in the tangle of greenery that comes to the very rocks of the coast. I knew it was there, because the birds made such an outcry when I walked through, flying around my head with pitiful and very unusual cries, — "cries to break one's heart," as Celia Thaxter says.

This bird is endeared to all lovers of Mrs. Thaxter by her warm love for him, as well

as by his own charming personality ; so little and so lonely he looks on the shore of the wide, wide sea.

"Never so tender a cry as his 'sweet! sweet!' is uttered by any bird I know," says the poet. "He has many notes and calls, some colloquial, some business-like, some meditative, and his cry of fear breaks my heart to hear ; but this tender call is happy with a fullness of joy that brings a thrill to the heart that listens." Sometimes he prefixes this common call with a long roll, "r-r-r-r-sweet! sweet!" which forms a peculiarly delightful variation.

This bird, probably the spotted sandpiper, aside from the charm of his voice, is one of the most winsome of birds, and graceful in every movement. His use of the wings is particularly expressive. They never seem to be mere means of flitting, like wings in general ; they are far more, they almost take the place of speech. By their movements he expresses his emotions, his sentiments, till, in watching him one realizes how much may be said without words, and longs for ability to interpret. On alighting, he holds them far above the

head for a moment before carefully folding them down in proper position. Sometimes when singing he keeps them vibrating rapidly, adding wonderfully to the effect upon the listener. Again, he will glide down through the air, holding them almost straight up, forming a sharp-pointed V. To drive away intruders or to meet an enemy he spreads the wings while ruffling up the plumage and making himself as formidable as possible; and in courtship he drags them on the ground. I have once or twice seen one of these birds express some emotion — alas, I could only guess what — by holding one wing up while looking with clear, calm eyes full in my face, "scanning me with a fearless eye."

The "tipping," which everywhere gives a sandpiper his local name of "tip-up," is not ungraceful. It reminds one of the rocking of a light canoe near the shore as the waves rush by.

There was never a prettier sight than a little flock of sandpipers flying over the edge of the water in zigzag fashion, moving as one bird, as if animated by one will.

Compare with this beautiful movement the

flight of a little party of cedar-birds. They go in a loose, straggling flock, each in his own way, without reference to the others, excepting to keep in the same general direction; now one is ahead, now another, some are higher, some lower. It is true this has its own charm, but it is the most careless flight I know, and in comparing the two one will realize how much character is expressed even in flight.

Sandpipers have a curious habit, when they alight on the shore in a flock, of standing a few seconds perfectly still as if turned to stone, then suddenly with one accord beginning to run around for food. Once I caught a young family out with their mother foraging for their supper. They were about half the size of the mother, and she stood perfectly still while the little flock ran about in the liveliest way, catching, or at any rate chasing, insects, with jerky motions like a grasshopper, and never intermitting for a moment the "teter." When the mother wished to go she called, and the obedient little ones at once followed her away.

In another place I watched one of this

beautiful family on a river-bank. It was charming to see him flying down the river just above the water, following its windings, now and then springing up into the air with tail spread like a white-tipped fan.

A fascinating thing about a sandpiper is his exquisite repose. One of these birds will stand the stillest the longest of any bird I know. None of the hurry and drive of the human life about him touches this lovely bird of the shore. I have sometimes watched one whom I had seen alight at the edge of the water till my eyes were tired and my arm ached from holding the glass, and I was almost ready to believe he was one of the pebbles he so much resembled, for while he is still he is absolutely invisible. More than half an hour he will stand perfectly motionless, apparently in deep meditation, yet plainly not asleep, for if something that he fancies happens to float by in the water, he snatches at it.

Even in so simple an act as bathing this bird has his peculiar way. One whom I watched waded out into the water, stooped, and threw water over his head in proper

hygienic manner, which I never saw a bird do before, and then he splashed for some time. When he came out he beat his wings several times, then ran up on to a higher stone and was still.

On this stone the wet bird stood as if he were part of it, making not the slightest movement, not even to "teter." Indeed, after I had watched him a long time, I thought I must be mistaken, and that he had slipped away. At least fifteen minutes — which seemed an hour — he stood there, apparently staring into the water, and I thought I had never seen a bird so careless about his toilet. But I did not know him. Suddenly he started up as if he had just thought of it, and began to dress his plumage. This was a work of time. I think I sat there an hour while he worked over those beautiful feathers, from top-knot to last tail-feather, especially the silvery-shining breast, and all the time "tipping."

An infant sandpiper is a droll-looking fellow, with a body measuring an inch and a quarter, not so long as a common mouse, and legs almost as long as his mother's. On

these most useful members, before his wings are of use, he can run like a flash — much faster than any boy. He comes out of the egg all dressed in soft gray down, and looks like a tiny shadow flitting over the ground.

A friend tells a story of the cleverness of a sandpiper in outwitting a hawk. When the little bird, flying ahead of a small boat on a river, saw the hawk hovering over his head, talons dropped, ready to seize him, he suddenly disappeared completely from sight of both the hawk and the man. The great bird looked anxiously about, still hovering in the same spot, turning his head this way and that, evidently amazed by the mystery. At last he gave it up and flew away, but the man watched closely, and in a few minutes saw a tiny head about as big as a walnut thrust out of the water, which was ten feet deep in that place. It turned every way, looking sharply for the enemy, and seeing the coast clear, the sandpiper came to the surface, shook out his wings, and rising into the air with the greatest ease, proceeded on his way. He had been entirely submerged.

Sometimes on the shore I had a study of

a still more devoted sea-lover — that queer fellow, the loon. Many uncanny stories are told of this bird, all probably arising from his peculiar note, "the loon's unearthly cry," as Mrs. Thaxter says. Three of these birds seemed fond of the neighborhood of my seat, and were often to be seen far out on the water, feeding and enjoying themselves. On arriving they seemed very nervous, turning their heads this way and that, as if to make sure no enemy was near. After a while they appeared to be reassured, having indeed — so far as could be seen — the whole broad ocean to themselves.

I watched these curious birds through my glass very closely, and nothing they did — neither their long stay under water, nor their occasional raising themselves above it, with flapping wings and showing the whole of their body — interested me so much as their power of regulating the depth to which they sank. Usually they sat like ducks, with the larger part of the body above the surface, but again one would quietly sink down till only the head and neck were above the surface. Either position seemed perfectly easy

to him. This extraordinary power of holding themselves at any desired depth in water, possessed by ducks, geese, and some other water-birds, is of great interest, and a most useful accomplishment to those who are hunted. Many stories are told of birds escaping in this way from their enemies, as one just related of a sandpiper.

None of our popular sayings about the birds and beasts is more utterly absurd than "crazy as a loon." The loon is a very clear-headed fellow, wise in conducting his life, a fond parent, brave in defending the young, full of resources to outwit his enemies, and quite capable of taking care of himself.

Among the most attractive of the sea-lovers were the gulls, —

> "Winging their silent way,
> In the glow of the dying day," —

in little parties of two or three or half a dozen, all headed for a rocky ledge far out from shore, where they settled for the night, looking as if the sombre rock had suddenly burst into bloom, or sitting on the water to take their fill from a shoal of small fish incautiously near the surface.

It is pleasant to know that some of these sea-lovers are so devoted to the briny deep that they even drink its — to us nauseous — water, as Mr. Brewster has proved by the conduct of a gull in confinement. This bird, a kittiwake gull, refused to drink at all until sea-water was provided for bathing, when he rushed at it as if dying of thirst, and from that time flourished upon his salty beverage.

One of my most interesting experiences with the sea-lovers was with young gulls. One afternoon I was attracted by strange cries which seemed to come from the sea. They sounded like the cries of a dog in distress, and as they continued some time I went down to the shore to see if I could do anything to help. The shore was very rocky, and full of crevasses into which a dog might possibly have fallen.

When I reached the shore, behold a party of gulls, twenty or thirty of them, some sitting quietly on the water, others flying around and alighting — a busy, happy group, and — as I saw in a moment — a nursery party. There were the young in

their gray dresses, waiting to be fed, making no effort to fly, but uttering the weird unbird-like cries, and their elders sitting with them, every few minutes rising and circling about, then returning to the little group on the water. It was a pleasing sight, and one that I enjoyed frequently during August.

Sometimes a more rare visitor passed over, with white head shining in the sun, —

> "Soaring superb overhead in the fathomless blue," —

an osprey or fish-hawk. On one occasion I had a nearer view. The bird was found walking by himself in the woods, in a quiet and matter-of-fact manner, as if walking were his ordinary way of getting about. When approached he did not fly, and indeed he made no resistance when picked up by a lady and carried into a house. He was placed on the floor and a much-interested audience gathered about him, though at a respectful distance, for he looked formidable enough with his fearless eye, his savage beak, and great talons. He was not in the least afraid or wild, and made no attempt to get away. He returned the somewhat rude stares

of his human neighbors with perfect composure, looking earnestly from one to another, almost, it seemed, with a curiosity like our own, alert and extremely wide-awake, but never stirring unless some one came too near, when he was at once on his guard. If he had cause to fear attack he threw himself on his back in fighting attitude, and presented his terrible talons as weapons of defense. The intelligence of his eyes and his manner almost persuaded one that he could speak if he chose.

The dress of the captive was beautiful, of rich chocolate-brown, with every feather of back and wings tipped with white, a white breast, and a white crest, which falling back on his head as he flies, gives this bird the appearance of being bald.

As soon as the osprey was made to understand that the piece of fish presented to him at the end of a stick was a peace-offering, he accepted it readily, and after that was easily fed, the lady who captured him actually going fishing to provide his bill of fare.

On examination it was found that the poor fellow had been shot, and though not dis-

figured, some bones in one wing were broken so that he could not fly.

One of the professors in a New Jersey college told me a touching story of a pair of ospreys. He was with a prospecting party in northern Minnesota who one day set fire to some bushes on the border of the lake. The fire spread to the trees, upon which they betook themselves to their canoes and withdrew to some distance, where they sat and watched the spread of the flames. Out into the water reached a point of land on which were trees, and on a big dead one a fish-hawk's nest.

As the fire approached, the birds became very uneasy, flying around and around, going to the nest and then away, and showing the greatest distress. At last the flames swooped down upon their tree with irresistible force, and the two birds, at the moment flying about over it, instantly, with one accord, turned downward and, diving into the doomed tree, perished with their young, whom they could not save.

Another frequent visitor to the shore was a sea-lover only for the food he found on its

bountifully spread table, the beach, — the common crow. I am always interested in the wise and quaint ways of this much-maligned fellow creature, and I am glad to relate a little incident told me by a practical farmer in New Jersey. This farmer was by no means a "bird crank," on the contrary, he was as implacable a persecutor of other birds as the most bloodthirsty enemy of our little brothers could desire.

"I learned in one lesson," said the farmer, "to respect and even to value the crow, and now I never allow one to be shot," and he went on to relate that he had one year a plague of cutworms which got possession of a cornfield and threatened to destroy it. He was told that the only way to rid himself of the pest was to go over the field every day and wherever he saw a bit of corn cut off, to dig out the worm and kill it.

In desperation he started in his big cornfield this almost hopeless undertaking. He worked one day at it and "nearly broke his back," as he said, and the next morning the worms were as plentiful as ever. He began seriously to contemplate abandoning the corn

to them, when he noticed some crows stepping around among the young plants. Knowing the reputation of this bird as a corn-lover, he supposed, of course, that they belonged to the army of destroyers, as if the worms were not enough to finish the crop. For a wonder, he did not at once proceed to shoot the birds, but in an unusual " spasm of sense " resolved to find out positively what they were about. To his great surprise he discovered that they were doing just what he had been attempting at such expense of muscle and temper — digging out and killing cutworms. He instantly decided to leave the field and let the crows work for him. He did, and the birds cleared the ground completely, doing no harm to the crop.

Let this little story, which is absolutely true, offset some of the " hearsay " tales of this bird.

If I had not — lo, these many years — been telling the truth and nothing but the truth, however alluring the path of fiction, or, at least, of " supposing," confining myself strictly to absolute facts with the devotion (if not the spirit) of a Gradgrind, I should

not dare imperil my reputation by telling my experience with a crow that summer. Relying, however, upon my "good name," and further fortified by the discovery that another reputable student has also heard the same, I will venture. I had heard for several days a crow shout "hur-rah!" or the vowel sounds that irresistibly suggested that word, so plainly that I was startled, and thought it must be an escaped pet who had been taught. The peculiar call seemed to come from one bird only, and with a very strong glass I was able to see from a window a strange scene.

The bird of the remarkable note appeared to be the leader of a small flock, for he was perched on the top branch of a tree, while perhaps eight or ten occupied the lower branches. Every time he uttered his "hurrah" call they answered with the ordinary "caw," at the same time flying around the lower part of the tree in a small circle and returning to their places, while the leader never left his perch at the top. This performance was kept up an hour at a time, and I heard it daily through the season, though

not always from the same tree. The next year I was there again, but never once heard the strange call.

Two years later I was aroused one morning at four o'clock from a semi-sleeping state by the same cry. The "hur-rah," always given twice, was instantly followed by a clamor of crow-voices crying "caw," and then a silence. This was repeated several times, gradually moving farther away, till I could hear it no longer.

In studying the common crow one may always look for the unexpected. A small flock of these birds on the shore of Long Island a few years ago adopted an escaped green parrot. He flew with them and fed with them undisturbed, even accepted by all. He adapted himself to their ways and even to their language, uttering his "caw" with energy, only his different quality of voice betraying him, and thereby calling attention to the strange partnership.

Many happy hours were spent with these and other sea-lovers in my favorite seat on the shore, till I received a shock which put a rude ending to my pleasure. One morning

on reaching the rock I found it a scene of desolation ; the sea had not risen and washed it away ; no storm had displaced it ; no workman disfigured it with hammer or chisel — but a party of human beings had been there — ladies perhaps. The rocks far around were strewn with lobster- and egg-shells, crusts of bread and bits of various provisions, a tin can or two, and a great greasy newspaper that had wrapped the whole.

I stood transfixed. The place was utterly defiled. One half hour's visit from a thoughtless party had destroyed the charm of a month's study. I turned and left, and visited it no more. So long afterward as the next June I approached it with hesitation, fearing that not even the storms of winter, the nine months of rain and wind and seas, had purified it from that half hour's occupation.

Is not that a strange phase of human nature — the spirit of lawlessness which seizes many of us in the country? Persons at home honest, well-bred, and thoughtful in dealing with others, suddenly blossom out into devastators and thieves. It may not be money or jewels that excite their cupidity,

but flowers and trees, often quite as valuable. In that very island no balsam-fir tree is safe from the hand of the destroyer. Branches are rudely broken off, whole trees disfigured and ruined, and often by ladies who would not dream of taking a neighbor's purse.

While on the subject of the idiosyncrasies of human nature, there is one other point on which I should like to relieve my mind — the tribulations that generally overtake a bird-student in the pursuit of her study. In one place where the only birdy spot was a lovely ravine filled with trees which ran along near some houses, the people, one and all, used it — the only beautiful retreat for miles around — as a common dumping-ground for all human waste. I cannot defile my pages with a list of the things that turned it into a most repulsive place; suffice it to say it consisted of all of the thousand and one things we constantly throw away.

If the spot that attracts a bird-student is a grove that might be a paradise for a bird-lover, it is usually turned into a forage-ground for domestic animals: cows roam over it, hens scratch, horses trample, even

hogs root it up. Bird-study in the vicinity of sometimes curious, sometimes vicious cows is not pleasant even though one may agree with Thoreau that a cow is good company because she has not to be entertained. A hen suddenly going into hysterics — hen-fashion — makes distracting interruption to study.

If the place selected for study is a neglected spot, or the inviting corners of an old rail fence on which Nature has been at work, producing vines and quick-growing plants, till it is beloved of birds and bird-lovers, no sooner does one set up her study there than a spasm of "virtue" seizes the owner, who straightway appears with horses and plough or a scythe to cut down or plough up the growth that made it a delight.

If a bit of open woods tempt the student, woods not good enough for cattle, it will be sure to be filled with sheep with their horned protector, who — like other folk — has his suspicions of an intruder on his domain who seems to have nothing to do, and is amply able to make himself disagreeable.

These are no fancy sketches. They are sadly and dishearteningly common. In all

my search I have found but two good places for study near houses, and therefore under the eye of man. One, the home of a fellow bird-student where a piece of woods was protected from trespassers, surrounded with stone walls and left untouched just as Nature arranged it. The other an abandoned Maine farm, bought by a Boston bird-lover, who kept her thirty-five acres of pasture with streamlet running through, and overgrown to bushes and all wild growths, absolutely untouched by man, resisting the pleading of neighboring farmers to "burn it over" in the fall, and forbidding shooting or trespassing of any kind.

And now — having uttered my protest — let us change the subject.

THE COMICAL CHEBEC

The pleasure that belongs to observation is really far greater than that which attends any kind of skill or dexterity. Let any one who has an eye and a brain (especially the latter) lay down the gun and take up the glass for a week, a day, even for an hour if he is lucky, and he will never wish to change back.

Selous.

X

THE COMICAL CHEBEC

I HAD taken a long journey and penetrated into one of the obscure corners of New England, a little away from the coast, a corner not at that time "discovered." I had taken possession of a pleasant large room, looking from one window into the woods, from the other down the road, our only tie to the common every-day world. I had spent the usual hour "getting settled." That means more than hanging dresses in a clothes-press, and placing other things in bureau drawers. For I had been many years a summer sojourner in farmhouses and out-of-the-way places, and although I had learned to "put up with" and to "do without," in fact, to adapt my demands to whatever crude style of living I encountered, still there were several ways in which I could mitigate my lot, and my trunk held a curious conglomeration of these "mitigators."

Since conditions differ in every new place, I have long kept a list of "must-have's," and before leaving home have provided against them, so as to be prepared for whatever might confront me in the new place. There were wedges to put a check upon rattling windows, and light sticks to hold up the sash; mosquito-bar to protect against the singing hosts, with tacks and hammer to fasten the same; towels to supplement the gauzy product of the country; soap that one dares to use; vases of different sizes to hold the indispensable wild flowers; of course all conveniences for writing, including the most important — a really good ink.

These are the only indispensables, for, happily, it is a firm article of my creed to have no "notions" as to diet; to satisfy myself at the table that satisfies my hosts, mindful of the saying of some wise man, that "a little philosophy and a good digestion make all living endurable." With a solitary exception, I have always been able to do so.

Having settled these all-important matters and propped the lower window-sash — probably for the first time in its history — squarely

against the upper one, by means of a stick out of my trunk, I drew the one comfortable chair up by the window, and seated myself to see who might be my neighbors.

A well-placed window looking into some quiet corner of the outside world, furnished with blinds without and easy-chair within, has always been attractive to me. Indeed, I dislike ever to shut my windows, for I love to hear the cheerful bird-voices. Not even a fog, an old-fashioned sea-fog on the coast of Maine, will silence the cheery notes of robin, Maryland yellow-throat, swallows, sandpipers, and others. No rain is wet enough to dampen the musical ardor of the song-sparrow. So I wrap myself up and sit by an open window, whatever the weather.

The great charm of window-study is, of course, the becoming acquainted with the natural manners of our little brothers when they do not suspect an observer; and to one who has enjoyed that pleasure it is far more satisfactory than the longest list of birds merely seen and identified.

From such a point of vantage one summer I took note of the bewitching boys in

blue — the bluejays; and from another on the southern shore of Long Island I learned, by the daily study of weeks, something of the true character of that reserved personage, the kingbird.

From a third window I got insight into the ways of a still more reserved neighbor — the cuckoo, the "often heard when unseen": his graceful, loitering flight, though he can go like an arrow, and his quiet way, when disturbed, of slipping through a tree, instead of going around or over, and taking wing from the other side, in perfect silence.

Some exceedingly interesting observations were made from a window looking simply into a neglected corner of a fence, — a bit of common yard grown up to grass and daisies, and carefully protected from the all-destroying scythe. A fence overgrown with raspberry-bushes separated it from a pasture on one side, a clump of trees sheltered a spring at the bottom, and the woods came up to the back.

Here, unsuspected behind my closed blinds, I surprised charming secrets of bird-life which have been described elsewhere: the

tactics of a crow nursery; the red-headed woodpecker's family training; odd ways of the solemn phœbe; and, best of all, some of the personal idiosyncrasies of that coy fellow mortal, the veery. This bird, indeed, with his quaint and interesting manners when he supposes himself unobserved, I should never have known but for the friendly screen of the window-blinds.

In the same place I saw a purple finch wooing: the little sparrow-clad damsel sitting demurely on a branch with a wooer on each side about a foot from her. It was a contest of song. With wings and tail expanded to their fullest limit, and snowy breast-feathers fluffed out, each one turned toward her and poured out his choicest song, swaying the head and body from side to side with a tremulous, vibratory movement of wings.

The ideal window is, of course, in the country, looking into an orchard, or a neglected spot with a tree or two, where the hand of man never meddles, and wildings of all sorts have possession; a pasture well grown up to bushes; an unfrequented lane rich in

shrubs and vines; even a common roadside, if it is bordered by an old-fashioned fence or wall, or, still better, a rail fence which Nature has concealed, as she always will, if allowed, under beautiful wild growths of her own.

Before my window, one June, the ground descended a steep hill, rested a little at the foot in a pleasant, meadowy valley, and then rose sharply in a mountain clothed with woods to the top, the upper branches brushing the sky, and the lower border of greenery skirting the road which ran below. To me that beautiful wall of verdure reaching to heaven was not a mere collection of trees, not so many pines and beeches and maples, — it was a vast dwelling, in whose shaded aisles the wonders and the mysteries of life were being enacted.

At that window I loved to sit and think of the thousands of rustic cradles rocked by the sweet June breezes, cunningly hidden in clumps of leaves, safely chiseled out in tree-trunks, or packed away in a thousand and one nooks and corners under the ample green roof. And it was my delight to fancy the

busy and happy inhabitants going about in their work of home-making, or later, rearing their little families, bathing in the brooks that came down the slopes, taking their daily food from an ever-spread table and filling the air with loud, joyous shouts, and cries and calls of infinite variety.

As " the twilight gathered " one after another blessed voice was hushed. Then came the picture of the beautiful birds retiring to their innocent sleep, any twig in their fair leafy world a comfortable bed, every feathery shoulder a sweet pillow, with no roofs to shield from the weather, no bolts or bars to protect, happy and peaceful and fearless, as I earnestly believe, till something of the restfulness and trust of these little lives passed into the soul of their lover.

Then, as darkness came on, the place of these woodlanders was taken by others, who love the " high fastidious night." The whip-poorwill sent his hearty greeting to the world; the slanderously named screech-owl sounded his quavering song, and his larger brother made the woods ring with his happy " hoot," melancholy only because we so interpret it,

reading our own mood into it. And I could not resist the conviction, that night, so far from being the terror it is to some of us, with our possessions to guard, is a time of rest and peace to our brothers of the woods; that if death comes to some of them, as it must to all of us, it is sudden and unexpected, and doubtless generally unconscious — surely a more "happy dispatch" than the lingering exit we crave.

The question of the preying of animals upon one another is of great interest, and considering the example in the way of taking life that we set them, it is amusing to see the horror and virtuous indignation we lavish upon birds and beasts who simply follow our lead, though in a much more humane manner.

Moreover, if the late Maurice Thompson's theory is true, that birds in a state of nature never die of old age, that they are immortal unless killed, it would appear that they were created to be the prey of one another. It is to be regretted that Mr. Thompson did not live to produce the proofs he promised in support of this extraordinary theory.

Having these pleasant experiences with the possibilities of a window, I looked with interest, on this occasion, — as I said, — to see who might be my neighbor.

I found myself immediately an object of interest to a small personage dressed in sober brown and standing on a half-dead tree near the house. He greeted me with a quick, emphatic "phit!" jerked his tail, and plainly resented the opening of a window into his domain. I saw at once, with regret, that I had pitched my tent beside the smallest of the flycatchers, the least flycatcher, or chebec.

I say with regret, for two reasons. First, the presence of one of these birds seriously interferes with the morning service of song, — one of the most cherished pleasures of bird-study, — for he takes it upon himself to regulate the singers of his own vicinity, and though in fair fight almost any one of the sweet songsters could conquer his place, chebec would make it extremely disagreeable for him.

Since the world is wide and there are plenty of nice places, why should a bird rush into a disputed corner? No bird feeling the

spirit of song upon him, can be supposed to fight for his right to a place; he would naturally prefer to take his stand out of the range of this "fiery particle" with such blustering manners.

Birds who confine themselves to the ground chebec seems to tolerate — or possibly looks down upon — the monotonous trill of the chipping-sparrow rouses not his antagonism; robin and hermit-thrush song may reach me from beyond his circle; but not a warbler, — neither summer yellow-bird nor Maryland yellow-throat, — not a purple finch, goldfinch, or vireo, not even a grosbeak is allowed to add his sweet notes to the chorus.

I admit that chebec does his little best to supply the lacking voices. He sings most vigorously all the magic hours between daylight and full sunshine; but an everlasting, jerky "chebec!" is not in the least inspiring — hence my regret.

The second reason for my never having felt inclination to make this bird's acquaintance was that I had taken the verdict of the books as final. He was simply the least fly-

catcher, and nothing more to be said about him, but I found, on closer acquaintance, that, as usual, the books do not tell everything.

My small neighbor proved to be a character, a person of ideas, with individuality as pronounced as if his measure had been in feet instead of inches. It was evident that in his estimation the epithet "least" did not apply to anything about him, not even his size, for are there not kinglets and humming-birds? Moreover, does not our Concord philosopher distinctly say "no virtue goes with size"?

My study of this plucky little fellow was most entertaining. Many hours daily I spent listening to his various calls and cries, for the "chebec!" is merely his public performance, his official utterance. He is by no means confined to it. Indeed, no bird I know is limited to one expression, any more than are we of the human race. His squealing cries as he flung himself with fury upon an intruder, and his low muttering to himself on his return, were most comical, while his gentle conversation with his mate as they sat together on the tree was totally unlike either.

As days passed and I learned to know him better, and appreciate his untiring vigilance, I wondered that my little friend allowed me to sit at my window so near him; and if he had really resented it, he had it in his power to make it so uncomfortable for me that I should have been forced to abandon my seat. He did feel some misgivings about it, I am sure, for he kept a stern eye upon my slightest movement, and often expressed his sentiments with florid eloquence that unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately for my peace of mind, I could not understand.

Sometimes my very wide-awake neighbor took no notice of me, dismissed my case, if I became too obvious, with a contemptuous "phit!" but again he would sit on the fence ten feet from my window, crest raised, looking fierce enough, and address a good many remarks to me, which his manner forbade me to consider complimentary. Once or twice he came much nearer than usual, hovered before my window, poised gracefully on beating wing, taking observation, and expressing sentiments which I much fear were not alto-

gether flattering, though I felt that I deserved well of him, for if I did spy upon him, I never intruded beyond my bounds. The window-sill was my limit, and how much farther my glass took me it is not to be supposed he knew. He was always as full of talk as if he had not opened his mouth before I came to furnish an audience.

The least flycatcher is the most "bumptious" bird I know. Not only does he demand a whole tree, sometimes more than one, to himself, — a claim absurd for such a little fellow, — but he will scarcely allow another bird in his neighborhood. My small friend in brown was a fair representative of his family. If a bluebird came with his sweet call to the maple, instantly chebec precipitated himself upon him with savage cries, crest erect, as fierce as if the lovely blue visitor were a hawk. He was far more self-assertive than any of his relations whom I know. No kingbird, notwithstanding his belligerent reputation, can compare in this quality with the insignificant midget no bigger than my thumb called the least flycatcher.

While sitting at my window I would sometimes hear a strange bird-voice on the maple-tree. Very carefully would I peep out to see. Lo! chebec was there before me on the lowest limb, turning his head this way and that. I knew his eyes were quicker than mine and his position more favorable, so I would look at him to see where to turn my eyes. In one instant he would dart off toward the top of the tree, and somebody would vanish in a hurry.

There was once an amusing scene between chebec and a robin. The robin alighted on a fence, nearer the old tree than was agreeable to its fiery resident, who consequently flung himself upon the larger bird with his harshest cry. The robin departed, — as who would not before such an onslaught? — but in an instant he returned with loud cries of rage and defiance going through his whole vocabulary of insulting, mocking, and taunting notes, flirting his tail and jerking his wings, daring the small foe to try it again. He could not get over it. He was evidently furious that he had been surprised into flight, and wished to wipe out the fact by his

vehement denial. Long after chebec returned to his own business the robin continued to remonstrate and explain from the fence. To all these demonstrations, though they continued for half an hour, chebec, calm in his own tree, was perfectly indifferent. What he wanted was to make the robin leave his premises, and that he had done, and what the robin said about it afterward did not concern him in the least.

The only bird who refused to leave at the bidding of this peremptory personage was — curiously enough — one of nearly his own size, and one with no reputation for belligerency, a white-breasted nuthatch, a mother at that, with one little one following her about. When chebec descended upon this pair like a small tornado, Mamma Nuthatch met him with defiance, actually running at him, driving him back to his own tree, and then going on her way quietly, calmly uttering her droll "quank! quank!" and stuffing innumerable morsels into the mouth of her charge.

Madam Chebec is fully as "bumptious" as her mate. In one place of study she laid

claim to a row of five trees, because she had a nest in one of them. She drove away chickadees, purple finches, and indeed any one whom she could intimidate, by hurling herself upon them. I judged that it was Madam because she did not sing, and I am sure chebec himself is not capable of long silence.

At another time I caught her (again I suppose it was the female, because she was building) helping herself to her neighbor's goods. At that time I was watching with interest the making of a home by a Baltimore oriole. She had hung her hammock from the top branch of an elm-tree, and was putting in the finishing touches, closely attended by her mate.

This gorgeously clad personage seemed to consider it his duty to guard and protect only, although this suspicion may do him an injustice, for I have seen one of his kind, ready and anxious to do his share of the work, not allowed by his capable spouse to touch a thread of the precious structure. Whatever may have been the reason, the bird I was watching was merely a protector, following his busy partner afield for material, and alight-

ing on the next tree to watch her while she added it to the mass.

Instead of guarding the nest-maker, the event proved that he should have guarded the nest, for alas! others who wanted nesting material were about. Attracted one morning by the flutter of wings, I glanced over to the elm branch, and saw to my astonishment a small bird hovering before the unfinished cradle. While I looked he — or was it she? — snatched at it, once, twice, three times, and at the third time brought out a small bunch of fibres, with which he — or she — flew away. I snatched up my glass, but the small thief was too nimble for me. She was out of sight before I could catch her.

I watched, however, for the return of the pilferer, and in due time I had her. She waited quietly on a neighboring apple-tree till the builder had woven another load of material into her hammock and gone, and then approaching cautiously, she repeated her sly theft. It was a chebec. Afterwards I traced her home and found a nearly finished nest in an apple-tree near the barn, far away from the oriole's neighborhood. Three or

four times an hour this little bit of thievery took place, but whether one or both of the pair took part I could not discover.

There is a good deal of what we call common sense packed away in that tiny head. I have told elsewhere of a chebec being induced, by the convenience of supplies, to use human-provided material for building her nest, but when it proved inadequate, being totally destroyed by rain, she rejected further advice and assistance, even leaving the vicinity of the would-be friend whose ill-considered help had made her so much trouble.

The flycatchers are an interesting family. If not particularly beautiful (though some of them are even that), they are certainly most useful and exemplary in their lives. We have dubbed them tyrants, which name not all of them deserve, and we have classed them among the songless birds, though the best known of them — the kingbird, wood-pewee, and phœbe at least — have each a sweet, though not very loud song.

As a family, flycatchers are not nervous. Any one of the tribe that I know will let one stare at pleasure at the home life. Apparently

they are sure the nest is safe and they have sublime confidence in their ability to defend their own.

What should above all commend these birds to our friendship, not one of them, so far as I know, ever disturbs the fruits of the earth, which we claim for our own. Their food is, without exception, I believe, the insect life that is a pest to us. Even the kingbird, who is accused of eating bees, has been proved many times to take only the drones. For once, a name has been well bestowed; they are, in fact, as in name, flycatchers.

HAPS IN THE FIELD

Many haps fall in the field
Seldom seen of wishful eyes.

EMERSON.

XI

HAPS IN THE FIELD

WHEN I desired a change from the bird-life allowed to me by my autocratic neighbor chebec, I betook myself to an old pasture overgrown with bushes and scattering trees, and found a comfortable seat under a tree.

This place was always attractive, but was especially beautiful at the time the evergreens — balsam firs and spruces — were putting on their new foliage, every branch and twig decorated with light new tips, looking as if covered with blossoms; thus showing, as Emerson says, —

> "How the sacred pine-tree adds
> To her old leaves new myriads."

Even the juniper was frosted over with freshness, and the bayberry looked sweet enough to eat. I tried Thoreau's plan of "browsing," but I did not like it.

In the pasture I found many birds. The most delightful was the goldfinch, "in amber

plumage freaked with jet." No bird more fully than this small fellow creature expresses the joy of living. His flight, as he goes bounding through the air uttering a gleesome note with every wing-beat, is pure ecstasy. Often, when he has apparently no desire to get anywhere, he will fling himself upon the air with vehemence, make a wide circle, and return to his perch, or bound straight up ten feet or more, and then drop back, pouring out his delicious notes, evidently because he is so brimful of bliss, —

> "Of the wild delight
> Of wings that uplift and winds that uphold him,
> The joy of freedom, the rapture of flight."

The wooing of this dainty little creature is comically like human society manners on similar occasions. There is a whirl of excitement, everybody puts on his best airs, sings, if he can sing, talks, if he can only talk. They indulge in dances and plays, take excursions together, and fill the air with noise and song, *á la* young man and maiden. His wooing-song is rapture itself.

The goldfinch has a wonderful variety of songs and calls, and with his mate an appar-

ently endless number of conversational notes, all in the same sweet voice. He is one of the most voluble of birds, and I am constantly hearing new utterances of various kinds from him.

The domestic life of the pair is bewitching, —the little matron so timid and clinging, with such an appealing call, and the small spouse so tender and devoted, sobered from his usual jolly mood, and fully impressed with his responsibility as head of the family. They always remind me of a boy-and-girl play-marriage, a sort of Dora and David Copperfield affair. When he approaches the nest and gives his coaxing call, she is generally unable to resist it, but leaving nest or eggs, or whatever engages her, flies out to join him, and away they go, bounding through the air, shining like atoms of sunshine against the sombre spruces, and in a moment returning to the point they started from.

I have elsewhere told the story of a young goldfinch having been cared for by a canary. Well-authenticated cases of similar kindness to others are not uncommon among birds. The subject has been treated from a scientific

standpoint, it is said, by a French writer, who asserts boldly that the animal is superior to man in altruism. "Animal Societies," he says, "are less polished, but, all things being equal, are more humane than ours." This doubtless sounds absurd to most people, but one who has closely studied living birds, free, and under natural conditions, finds much in their lives which makes him at least consider.

An incident bearing on this point occurred not long ago in a Western city. It caused surprise and aroused great interest in those who saw it, and it is fully vouched for by unimpeachable witnesses. This is the story: A nestling of the red-headed woodpecker species was found on the ground, injured so that he could not fly, nor even hold on to a branch when placed there by a sympathetic friend; and by the way, I once had personal experience with a bird of the same species afflicted in the same way.

The little unfortunate remained on the ground, hopping about in disconsolate fashion, assiduously attended by his distracted parents. Other woodpeckers came around

and added their assistance, but none of them could restore him to safety on a tree.

While in this unhappy position, he attracted the attention of a robin. Now this bird is not very hospitable to strangers; indeed, he is conspicuously otherwise, but no bird that I ever watched is unfriendly to the young. A baby seems to make the same demand upon the tenderness of its elders in the bird-world that it does in the human. The robin recognized the needs of the youngster, and bustled about till he secured a lively earthworm, which he stuffed into the throat of the sufferer.

The conduct of the robin was surprising to people not well acquainted with the ways of birds, but still more strange was the effect of the baby's appeal on the family cat. This cat was a great hunter, and when he saw a bird on the ground he started for it with the obvious intention of eating it. On reaching it and seeing its helpless condition, he seemed to appreciate the case, and instead of seizing what was to him a tempting morsel, he began to play with the bird, as a cat plays with a kitten. Several times this little drama was enacted,

to the amazement of the observers, who, let me say, were intelligent, trustworthy people.

The cedar-bird, or cedar-waxwing, was another tenant of the old field, and I saw him that season for the first time in the position of head of a family. Through apple-blossom time the year before I had watched a small party of cedar-birds who spent much time in the orchard. They appeared to be very busy among the blossoms, and I brought my strongest field-glass to see what they were doing. I found that they were pulling off the white petals, dropping a part, but, to my surprise, eating a part of them. I could see them very distinctly take a petal in the beak and draw it in, crumpling as it disappeared. No doubt they were primarily seeking insects among the blossoms, but they certainly added an occasional petal to their bill of fare. That they did no harm to the fruit became evident when apples appeared, which I noted carefully, as I remained there till October. I never saw apple-trees so loaded. Branches were borne to the ground, and even broken by their burden, while only one tree in the whole orchard showed any signs of insects.

The cedar-bird — as every one knows — is a pattern of propriety, a feathered "Turveydrop," without the faults of that apostle of "deportment." In every-day life his plumage is never ruffled. He shows no excitement, has no restless, fidgety ways, and his voice is never raised above the low tones of good breeding. He will sit an hour at a time motionless, with an elegant repose of manner unequaled by any bird of my acquaintance. One can almost believe that — as some one says — a cedar-bird will die of nervous shock if his plumage is soiled. Though he so much dislikes disorder, however, he does not mind wet, — no rain disturbs his beautiful equanimity. He will sit during a heavy shower with perfect composure, only laying his crest back flat upon his head, and occasionally shaking out his plumage.

Even through the agitations of courtship, — that time that tries man's (and bird's) soul, — he abates not a jot of his reserve and dignity.

There is, however, one period in the life of this interesting fellow creature when he no longer sits by the hour silent and motionless

on a twig as if glued to the perch, but is all life and animation, arriving in a bustle, with feathers awry, and immaculate plumage in slight disorder; when he forgets to be dignified, taking no stiff attitude, but bending over, jerking about, and staying but a second in a place; when he resents the appearance of the bird-student, and even swoops down towards her in threatening manner; when one would think he must long for a voice to shriek out his anxiety and distress. That time is during his parental cares, while he is feeding and training his little family, especially after they have left the nest and begin to show the reckless independence characteristic of the young — bird as well as human.

Nothing can be more lovely than the young cedar-bird in his soft, fluffy, gray-spotted coat and yellow-tipped tail, looking straight into one's eyes with innocent, babyish expression, and confiding ways that win the heart, or sitting beside his brothers of the nest, hour after hour, with the composure of his race.

One summer a young cedar-bird alighted on the shoulder of a man passing down a rather wide intervale, doubtless tired with

the long flight across. He was brought in and remained in the house a day, giving opportunity for a close examination of his plumage. I was surprised to see the " sealing-wax " tips to his wing-feathers already assumed, being like very fine threads, not more than one sixteenth of an inch long, though of the regular sealing-wax color. The little fellow showed no fear or dread of the human species, painfully reminding us that it is only in ignorant infancy that a bird dares to trust us. Finding that the waif could fly well, he was set free in a place frequented by the little group to which it was supposed he belonged.

On another occasion I have seen a young bird of this species come onto a piazza where people were sitting, fly about among them, and almost alight on one. They seem to be unusually confiding youngsters.

That summer also I had another experience with the cedar-waxwing, as intimated above — I saw him in his domestic rôle. I first noticed one trying to secure a bit of string which was tangled in an apple-tree. This, of course, aroused my suspicions, for when a bird

becomes interested in strings it is time to watch him. After tugging a long time in vain, he went away, and in a moment returned with another, presumably his mate, and both worked at the obdurate string. Several times during the day the pair returned and struggled with that much-desired string.

I watched, and saw the birds go to a maple a little way off, where I soon found the nest, and a great deal of soft chattering going on about it. I was pleased to see that the cedar-bird can be talkative in his subdued way.

As head of the family this bird was most devoted. He brought food constantly to the sitting bird, who left the nest to receive it, fluttering her wings like a nestling, and chatting volubly.

The cedar-bird is under a ban as a cherry-eater. No doubt he is fond of that fruit and eats some, though not so much as is supposed. But I want to protest against the common fashion of speaking of a bird taking fruit as "stealing." To the bird, with no knowledge of human decrees, it is perfectly right to "take my own wherever I find it," and the

act has no moral significance whatever, while that epithet, constantly applied, creates a prejudice against a most useful bird.

It has been proved many times over that the cedar-bird prefers to fruit canker-worms and other insects, of which he eats enormous numbers, and even of fruit he chooses the wild instead of the cultivated, when both are at hand. I have seen them, when low-bush blueberries were ripe, bring their young family and spend nearly all day "blueber'n," as the natives say.

In the fateful summer of which I write, I saw — what I had never seen before — a flock of purple finches. There were fifteen or twenty of them, and the singing was simply ecstatic. One purple finch song is a delight, but when it is reinforced by eight or ten other voices as bewitching as itself, the effect is bewildering. This little flock were in the wildest spirits. They sang, and sang, and sang, as if they were drunk with music, or had fairly gone mad. Even some of the demure sparrow-garbed females (as I suppose) sang. Now and then I heard one alone on a tree apparently singing to herself. It

was a distinctly purple finch voice, but it differed in arrangement, and was softer than any of the family I had heard. I judged therefore that it was a female and not the young of the previous year, although their plumage is so similar.

The variety in dress of the same species, as seen in this flock, was remarkable. Not only was the crimson of the various individuals of different intensity and depth of coloring, but it differed in extent. The breast, too, in some was of a muddy white or grayish hue, while the finer specimens sported a breast of snowy white. The little party were charmingly social. Sometimes they would fly out from a tall elm, all chattering like a party of school-girls.

From my seat I could see the dead branch watch-tower the kingbird is so fond of having over his nest. I soon found his nest in the top of an apple-tree, and saw that in this case he had two dead branch outlooks on the world. The lower one curved up about a foot above the nest, and was the one usually occupied by the mother, while the other reached up fully two feet above the foliage,

giving him a wide view over the neighborhood.

This person of the royal name I found just as courteous to his mate as I have always found his species. He greeted her with a few notes and slight lifting of wings when she came, and when he brought food — after the young were out — he alighted near and announced himself, upon which she scrambled out of the nest and he administered the provision to the nestlings, then retired to his watch-tower to guard them, while the mother went off to feed.

There was much low talk between the kingbird pair, and some especially interesting over the youngsters when one parent was alone. Both of the pair talked this baby-talk, which was very low. I could scarcely hear it, although I was within six feet of the nest, and perfectly silent.

As usual, I found the young kingbirds exceedingly interesting. When their heads began to show above the edge of the nest they looked exactly like little old men with gray fur caps on, and they began to show individuality as soon as they were out of

the cradle. The day they appeared on the branches of the apple-tree there came up a sudden shower. Three of the four newly emancipated began to shake and plume themselves, one of them indeed so frantically that he nearly lost his hold of the branch time and again. Two worked with vigor, but less violence; but the fourth sat there like a veteran without stirring a feather. This one always sat a little apart from the other three, who crowded together as I have seen young kingbirds before.

At another time, in another place, I was much interested in an exhibition of kingbird character. It was during a severe northeast storm which lasted six days. There were two days of strong, damp wind with heavy clouds, followed by three days' steady cold rain, and another of wind. I noticed the kingbirds on the first day of the rain. There was a little party of them — nine or ten — and they had possession of a chestnut-tree and a willow beside it, both trees much larger than any other in the vicinity. On these two trees they spent the day, often without moving for an hour at a time, sitting

upright as usual, making not the slightest effort to get food. They did not fly out after insects; indeed, no insect could be abroad in the steady rain. They did not attempt to take anything from the tree, and they never went to the ground.

I sat on the piazza for several consecutive hours every day, and watched them constantly, for there was nothing else to watch. Not only did they seek no food, they also appeared to scorn to protect themselves from the rain. They took the most exposed positions, outside dead twigs which these birds always like to perch on, and sat there like philosophers, without moving a muscle, so far as could be seen. They might have been wooden birds, for all the life they exhibited. On the third day of constant rain the kingbirds did not appear.

The kingbird is constantly called belligerent, and I have always watched closely to see his treatment of other birds. I never saw a kingbird object to any one — except a robin — alighting on his nest-tree, — the spot above all others a bird regards as private property, and protects almost with his life.

I have often seen flycatchers, warblers, swallows, and even that shy fellow, the cuckoo, alight on the kingbird's nest-tree when the so-called belligerent bird was on guard, but he took not the slightest notice of any one of them.

At the farther end of this delightful half-wild pasture a rose-breasted grosbeak had set up her home. I had not been able to find the nest, though I was sure it was there, for the bird was so madly afraid of her human neighbors that I had n't the heart to annoy her. I saw the head of the family very often, making himself useful in a potato-field close by, and I waited with what patience I might for the advent of the youngsters, whom I was sure no mother, however wary, could keep out of sight.

One afternoon I heard the peculiar baby-cry of the grosbeak, and set out to find it. At the edge of the thicket I was met by mamma, whose anxious salute assured me I was on the right track. I paid no attention to her, but sat down quietly and waited. After circling around me on all sides, repeating her sharp, metallic "klink," she was irre-

sistibly moved — as I hoped she would be — to look upon her little folks, to see how they fared; and thus she pointed them out to me.

There they stood, two of them, on the top branch of a tall maple, like silhouettes against the sky. They were not much to look at, with beaks almost as big as their heads, and dressed in brown and white, like the mother, but I was glad to see them. Hardly had I taken a good look, however, when the mother discovered that my glass was leveled at her young family, and instantly proceeded to remove her darlings in a way I have seen other mothers do. She dashed past them, just over their heads, almost — but not quite — touching them. This acted on the young grosbeaks with the power of magic; they followed at once, as though unable to resist. (The first time I saw this done, I thought the mother had knocked her baby off.) All three disappeared in the trees beyond.

One of my favorite seats was in a bit of woods just beyond the pasture, beside a brook. There were others who liked this

particular nook as well. Among the rest a small party, perhaps half a dozen, young cattle, "yearlings," as they were called. They had a wide expanse of woods and clearings over which to roam, but their invariable choice was an open spot across the brook from my seat. Here they would sometimes lie, staring at me and chewing gum with the enthusiasm of a backwoods school-girl, and sometimes stand about in a waiting attitude, doing nothing in particular. If I moved, their ears pricked up, and when I rose, they turned as one beast and fled in a panic, burying themselves in the deepest woods. This would be funny if it were not somewhat mortifying to find oneself a bugaboo to creatures so domesticated as barnyard cattle.

The movement that had so alarmed the beasts was to see who was stirring the ferns across the brook. As I approached, a pair of juncoes flew up with easy, loitering flight. Surely, I thought, their nest must be there, and I sought carefully among the ferns which grew up around an old log, but no nest was there.

I returned to my seat, hoping the birds would themselves point it out, for they had not gone far, but were hopping and flying about in the tree over my head, uttering their low "tick," which became a sharp "smack" as they grew bolder. At last one, and then the other, went to the ground at the foot of a tree across the brook. Each went in behind a projecting root, stayed a few seconds, and then flew to a branch and was quiet.

Surely the nest must be there, I said. Shall I go over and find it? But perhaps it is not there; then why with rash fingers destroy my own hopes? Let me please myself with the fancy that junco has chosen that snug spot for a nursery.

Again, if it is there, why should I draw the veil from his secret? By and by, when the babies are of age to be presented, junco himself will bring them forward in their charming speckled coats, and I shall see their innocent baby eyes and their unconventional manners much more agreeably than by thrusting myself rudely upon them in their nursery, while they are only scrawny,

featherless youngsters, and letting the poor little parents know they are discovered and their sweet privacy is liable to invasion at any moment.

No! I am not preparing a "Scientific Report." I will assume — for my own pleasure — that the junco family live across the brook under that convenient root. This assumption gave me the pleasure of fancying the spot peopled with an interesting pair of neighbors, and I enjoyed it, though, to whisper the truth, I never saw the birds go there again.

One resident of that pleasant nook was not so welcome. Indeed, I have found him everywhere a serious trial. It is a personage small in size, but great in his own opinion — the common chipmunk. Wherever one goes, however secluded the spot, or however difficult of access, the chipmunk is sure to be there first, perfectly at home. He is what our Western brothers call a "sooner," only his way is more simple than that of the human individual so named. He does not stake out a claim. He claims the whole, and is prepared to defend his right against all tres-

passers, which he does effectually by protesting so vehemently that all birds are driven out of the vicinity. What should the student do, if he were as big in body as he is in spirit?

On one occasion after an hour of vain attempt to tire out a chipmunk, and thus see some of the other residents, I resolved to seek another spot, if possible beyond the range of my noisy neighbor. The place I found somewhat farther into the woods was delightful, but hard to reach, being part way up the end of a rocky ledge which rose abruptly from the ground. The way — which apparently no one had trodden before me — was exceedingly steep, and slippery from its thick covering of dead leaves. By the help of an alpenstock, and digging out footholds, as mountain-climbers cut them in rocks, I reached the first ledge, and there I sat down to observe, and consider whether I would attempt the next elevation.

This place was most attractive. One side was perpendicular rock partly covered with moss and clumps of ferns, and in some places with big bark-covered roots of trees which

had strayed over the rock from above, seeking a more secure foothold. The other side of my shelf looked into thick woods. The floor was in great waves as if the earth's ribs came to the surface.

Surely, I thought, I shall have this place to myself. Alas, while the thought passed through my mind, behold chipmunk himself who came after! Not laboriously hauling himself up, and slipping back at every step, but lightly, easily skipping over every obstacle, with only his four clasping feet to help him. O what discoveries in bird-ways might one make were he but a chipmunk! It is a lesson in nest-finding to watch this knowing little fellow. He goes into every hole, through every tuft of grass or fern, thrusts his sharp nose into every crevice big enough for an egg, peeps into every bush, runs out on every branch, all in perfect silence, and almost as well as if he had wings. What bird indeed could hope to hide the nest from him if he should happen to be fond of eggs!

When his eyes fell upon me, after the first moment of breathless surprise, when he sat upright with his two hands upon his

breast as if to still the beating of his heart, he turned and fled, scampering over a fallen branch as if it were a highway, and from that giving a great leap to a stump, where, safely beyond my reach, he sat up in virtuous indignation, and uttered a voluble remonstrance against my presence in his grounds.

His shrieks and calls I knew were as intelligible to the woods-dwellers as to me, and in order to see any of them I must first silence him. I was obliged, therefore, to end his attempts at intimidation, and break the heavenly stillness of the woods, by a stick sent crashing through the branches near him. A hint of this sort is usually enough for Chip. He recognizes the superiority of the human race when it comes to a trial of force, and when one thus indicates that he is ready to take a hand in the fray he generally retires to some safe retreat; while, if the bird-student is meek and uncomplaining, the small autocrat will revile him for half an hour, apparently without once pausing for breath.

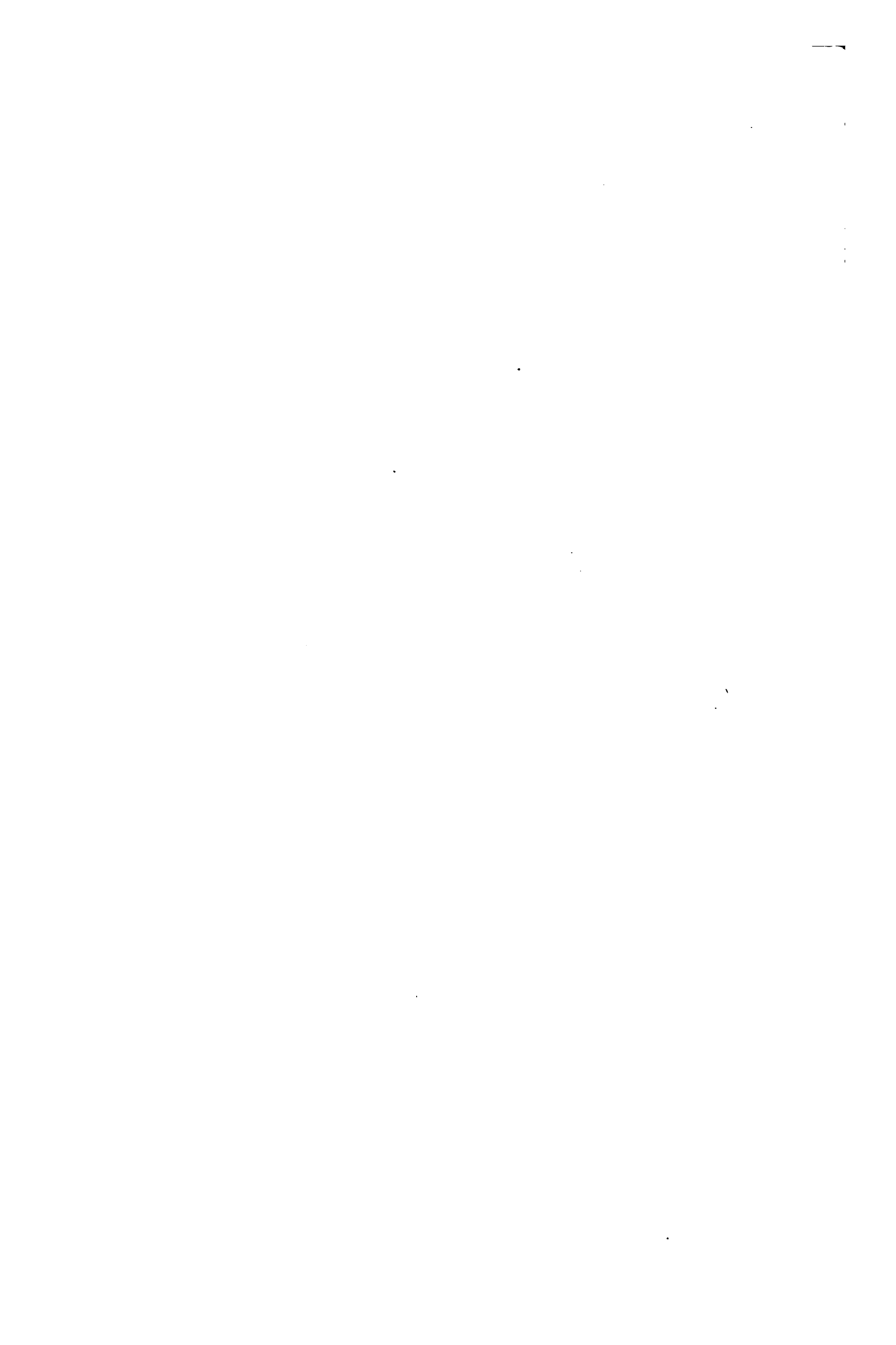
For a long time after I had intimated to the chipmunk that his presence was not agreeable to me, there was nothing to break what

we call the silence of the deep woods, though it is anything but that, being filled with its own mysterious sounds. The indefinable awe which always steals over one when alone in the solemn woods had taken full possession of me. I could not bear to move or make a sound, and had reached a state of tense expectancy — as if anything might happen.

Suddenly on the top of the ledge above my head there began a great crashing among the dry leaves, as if some large beast were rising from his lair. I rose hurriedly, remembering in a flash how far I was from the bars, how hard it would be to descend safely from the rock, and hastily considering what I should do if the unknown monster started down what now looked like a path toward me. The crashing continued: should I flee? could I outrun any malicious beast? Should I spring open my umbrella at him? Should I get out my "pocket-pistol," provided for a last resort, and loaded, neither with powder nor liquor, but with something to give any biped or quadruped wishing to force an acquaintance upon me, something else to think of for the moment?

While I hesitated — lo, a shriek that I knew; the saucy chipmunk emerged "full of fight," and I suddenly remembered that one of these small creatures can make as much noise scurrying about among the dry leaves as an elephant crashing through them.

I was relieved — but the woods-spirit had departed. This ridiculous anti-climax broke the spell of solitude, and put to flight all my reveries. I gathered up my belongings and prepared to pick my perilous way down the rocks, musing upon my small tormentor. Why did Nature make such a little beast, and endow him with such a big capacity for noise and confusion? and above all, why did she place him in the heart of her most beautiful creation — the woods?



MYSTERIES OF THE MARSH

DEAR marshes! vain to have the gift of sight
  Who cannot in their various incomes share,
From every season drawn, of shade and light,
  Who see in them but levels brown and bare.

LOWELL.

XII

MYSTERIES OF THE MARSH

In another place on the coast one of my windows looked across a marsh to the ocean half a mile away. This was an outlook of which I never tired. The marsh was always beautiful and never twice alike, and the sea at that distance was peculiarly interesting because of its curious variations of sound. Sometimes it roared above everything else; again I would hear it from far off one side as if it had retired down the coast miles away. Occasionally I could not discover any direction, but it seemed to moan under its breath as if all its life had been withdrawn to a great distance, and the waves near us were asleep. Sometimes it was silent as a millpond.

Almost as interesting as the sea was a dweller, or rather a visitor to the marsh. For here was a mystery. Every evening about seven o'clock a great bird, larger than

any other in the vicinity, flew slowly, solemnly, and heavily over the house, beating his enormous wings, and sometimes uttering a hoarse cry as he went. He alighted far over in the marsh, and wait and watch as long as we chose, we never saw him return.

It was always too dark to see who he was or what he did, even with the best glasses, and so it seemed it might always be a mystery. Four or five years, my hostess said, this had been his habit, and formerly he had a companion, but for a year or two he had been alone.

It was really pathetic to see the lonely bird wing his way to the solitary marsh after every other feathered resident had retired for the night. Perhaps he was the last of his race, and had learned by sad experience to keep hidden during the day, and feed only after dark. What tragedy had left him to suffer alone! Thus I thought, as I watched him going over on his lonely way.

If I could get nearer to the mysterious bird, I thought — I could see him better. So one evening just before time for him to appear, I started down the meadow to-

ward the marsh, intending to conceal myself behind a haycock which he usually passed over.

As I walked slowly along I met a family of young flickers. It was their first outing, as was plain to see, — so naïve, so innocent in their young assertive ways, so imperative in their announcement of their presence. Experience of the world had not yet knocked out of them the feeling of the nursery, that they were the most important objects on earth.

One of the disturbed parents appeared on a tree and called anxiously, but one of the brand-new young ones came into plain sight on the fence, and greeted a protesting robin with a vehement bow and an emphatic "peauk!" that claimed the world for his own, and demanded by what right the robin presumed to speak.

After pausing a few moments to enjoy this charming ingenuousness, I went on.

All the way I had been conscious of voices, and at length my eyes fell upon the talkers. They were two crows perched on the top branches of two trees and expressing their

opinions vehemently. "Caw! caw!" cried one in a sneering tone, emphasizing each utterance with an ironical bow, and "caw! caw!" echoed the other with bow more insulting and more profound than his comrade. Their faces were toward me, — could it be? was this a personal attention?

Before my anxiety became painful, it was relieved. Upon no worm of the dust had they cast their scornful eyes, but upon a monarch of the air like themselves. A large hawk rose from a neighboring tree, soared majestically up toward the blue sky, and instantly the two crows were upon him. Around and around went the larger bird in great circles, paying apparently no heed to his sable followers, who carried out the tactics made familiar to them by the plucky little kingbird. With great labor, much beating of wings, and loud screams of war, the clumsy birds rose above the hawk and then swooped down toward him, as if to deal him a savage blow. But they always missed him, and calmly the hawk pursued his "trackless path" while the baffled crows were carried far to one side. Still, if they were not successful, they had

good "grit," and as far as I could see them with my glass, the three were traveling in company, two rising high and swooping down, filling the summer air with their clamors, while the third, silent as fate, — and as resistless, — passed on whither he would without hindrance.

Now I passed on and settled myself to wait for the mysterious bird. Everything became quiet around me — it seemed as if everybody had gone to bed, for —

> "Precious qualities of silence haunt
> Round these vast margins ministrant."

A long time I waited, crouched beside my haycock, and confidently fancying myself unseen, but my bird did not come. He had sharper eyes than I had given him credit for, and he had swerved one side and passed over far to my left.

I was not, however, doomed to disappointment. I solved the mystery a day or two later, when I chanced to turn my glass on the marsh about noon: my eyes fell at once on the bird — or his double — who was evidently perfectly at home there. Whether he had changed his habits, or, what was more

likely, had heretofore eluded our sight, I know not. I know only that from that day I saw him frequently with one and sometimes two companions.

Then I easily recognized the marsh mystery as the great blue heron. He was engaged in the business which absorbs so much of the time of all of us — getting food. He stalked majestically about on the edge of the little pools, or in water up to his knees, at every step lifting his foot entirely above the water, in the most deliberate manner. Sometimes he stood an hour at a time in the patient heron way, when his long neck and slim head looked like a mere stick among the weeds, and again he plunged suddenly after some lively prey — perhaps a frog or an eel — almost turning a somersault in his eagerness. Then, after violently beating his catch, whatever it was, shaking his head, which flashed gleams like polished silver up to my distant window, and swallowing it at last, instantly resuming his stately appearance of perfect repose.

It was interesting to see the heron alight and fold over his enormous wings. First he

held them up a moment like a butterfly's wings, then carefully laid them down and adjusted them to place. All his common movements were so deliberate it was often hard to recognize him; he looked like an object of wood.

Occasionally this giant bird would sit down, draw his three or four feet of height together and look just like a big duck. Again he would hump up his shoulders, draw his neck down between them, making himself look like pictures we often see. In whatever attitude he assumed he was picturesque, but not always graceful, as when his long neck stretched up its full length, like a stick.

On one occasion a crow swooped down at him, but the heron met him halfway, springing up into the air as if threatening to catch him, upon which the crow thought better of it and left.

In color this bird, though called blue, harmonized so perfectly with the ground that he was almost invisible when still, but the moment he spread his wings he was exceedingly conspicuous, — such enormous extent of feathers, so slowly flapped, such a heavy

flight, he could be seen far off over the silent marsh.

The manners of this marsh-dweller were curious to watch. Sometimes he crept along with neck thrust forward its full length and level with his body, legs crouched, looking like a cat about to spring. On one occasion he suddenly pitched forward and downward as if his prey were in a hole, and so violently that he lost his balance, and saved himself from falling on his head only by a wild flapping of his sail-like wings. From this scramble he reappeared bearing something like a snake or an eel, which he shook and beat and at last ate.

Once this most stately personage had an unusually hard time disposing of his catch, and another heron who was on the marsh drew near, as if he would like to share. The possessor of the dainty, whatever it was, stood with feathers fluffed out till he looked twice as big as usual, and when the intruder came near, both the great creatures flapped their wings and sprang up three or four feet, exactly like two quarrelsome cocks. It was very comical, and surprised one as much as

if a couple of staid old gentlemen should suddenly run at each other like a pair of belligerent boys.

Though I made many attempts to see the great bird nearer, I was never able to accomplish it. No doubt long persecution had made him suspicious, and my slightest approach to the marsh was seen at once, and was the signal for the bird's departure. I did not wish to drive him away from what was perhaps his last retreat, so I abandoned the attempt to get a closer view of one of our most interesting birds.

At another time, a good many years ago, on a marsh farther down the coast, south of New England, in fact, I was interested to see another great bird, the American egret, feeding. When the tide went out, five or six of these birds would come up to feed on the edge of the little pools together. They traveled around the edge in single file, and naturally the last one found rather poor pickings. I was amused to see that the birds understood the thing, and every few minutes the one at the end of the procession would fly up over the heads of his brethren and take his place

at the head. The one at the moment in the lead never resented it, and the new-comer held his position till the next in the line followed his example. It seemed to be a perfectly amicable arrangement.

EARLY MORNING STUDIES

WONDERFUL was the morning! Everything preening and washing itself in the dewy glitter. . . . Every night a new heaven, every morning a new earth, — to be seen in the very act of creation, — yet we see them not, we shut them away behind heavy curtains, and the miracle goes on with none to see it.

LE GALLIENNE.

XIII

EARLY MORNING STUDIES

My bedroom, when I woke this morning, was full of bird-songs, which is the greatest pleasure in life, says Robert Louis Stevenson in one of his letters, thus expressing in his own felicitous way the sentiments of bird-lovers the world over. Few things in this matter-of-fact existence are more delightful than to be called out of dreamland by the sweet voices of birds, and to lie half awake, yet wholly conscious, to enjoy them, before plunging into the storm and stress of our daily lives. The morning-song is the most cherished pleasure of the bird-lover's day.

These early concerts are always interesting, and nearly all of them are charming, but it is not generally recognized that there is great diversity among them.

The study of our little brothers is made peculiarly fascinating by the fact that they show character and individuality in every

act of life, not only in song and manners, but even in their grouping. One shall scarcely twice find exactly the same species living together in the neighborhood. And since they sing about their homes, the songs of the morning in any given locality are determined by the species resident there. In a good many years of close observation I have never found much resemblance between the morning chorus of any two places.

The exceptional charm of the song of the morning first came into my consciousness a good many years ago in North Carolina where the bird of the South — the mocking-bird (who deserves a better name) — took the lead, and indeed usually furnished the entire programme of the morning performance, —

> "Trying to be ten birds in one"; —

sometimes, too, after having entranced me by a glorious midnight rhapsody.

Since that awakening, the first bird-note, be it mocking-bird or English sparrow, arouses me, and I lie and listen to the music that comes through my wide-open windows, so long as the overture lasts. For it is curi-

ous and suggestive that this opening song, in which all the birds of the neighborhood seem to take part, abruptly ceases after a certain length of time, and the efforts of the remainder of the day are scattering and sporadic, unlike in every way.

A very different service of song greeted me in the Rocky Mountains, at the foot of Cheyenne the Beautiful, with its tender and sad memories. The journey thither had prepared me for changes, for I went through Nebraska.

When a traveler from the Atlantic coast enters that state, he is impressed with its wonderful adaptation to farming. Not a hill, not a rock, not a stump to be seen. He remembers dear New England's stony heart, and Michigan's miles of stumps, and wonders that any one wishing to till the ground can stay where are roots to be grubbed up, rocks to be blasted, stones to be removed, and trees to be cut, and why all the world does not rush to this fertile plain. But as the hours go by he begins to think fondly about variety in scenery, and to yearn for a few trees, and to long for a rock or two, and

this feeling continues and grows till, from simple irritation, he becomes fairly exasperated with the endless flatness: the whole state pressed down and rolled out like a pie-crust. Through acres and acres of wheat, and miles and miles of corn, as if it had rained seed-corn, he goes, and before his train reaches the boundary he wonders that every soul in it does n't go raving mad from pure monotony.

When he reaches the Mountain State — Colorado — he wants to open wide the windows to get Nebraska out of his lungs, and to take in the mountains — pure air, blue sky, deserts, prairie-dogs, owls, and all; to get Nebraska cinders out of his eyes and her sameness out of his soul.

Around my camp in Colorado were Western meadow-larks, chewinks, and Western wood-pewees, but the songs of the morning were almost exclusively the dismal wails of the latter bird. Our own pewee has a sweet and plaintive little song, but his Western brother exaggerates it into a dirge, pessimistic in the last degree, and depressing to the spirits, while it is so loud one cannot ignore it.

Somewhat later in the day the chewink, or towhee bunting, would ring his silver bell-like peal, and when at its best this is one of our most exquisite bird-songs. A chewink who came about the camp daily, added to the usual strain — which is two staccato notes followed by a tremolo considerably higher — two more tremolos on different and lower keys, uttered so softly one could hardly hear them, but of a liquid, rapturous quality which defies description.

A little away from our grove the meadow-lark was glorious. Sometimes I was happy enough to hear his bewitching whisper-song in a sweet, low, trilling undertone, interpolated between the strains of the ordinary loud performance. That is another charm of the morning, — the frequency with which the birds indulge in these peculiar undertone efforts, — singing to themselves, as it were, and evidently not intending the public to hear. The diversity of sentiment about the song of the Western meadow-lark, which we often see expressed in print, is easily explained by the simple fact that the birds differ in quality of voice and execution.

A quiet retreat in New Hampshire, in sight of Chocorua, made famous by our lamented Frank Bolles, offered me a peculiar and more musical morning attraction, — nothing less than the song of the barn-swallow. Not the low, sweet utterance we are familiar with from our bird of the hay-loft, but strangely loud and clear, and poured out with all the freedom and abandon of a bobolink. It was such an exhibition of this bird's musical ability as I have seldom heard. The reason seemed to be that in that neighborhood he had to sustain almost the entire burden of song, the only other bird common about the place being the cedar-waxwing, who rarely speaks above a whisper. This being the case, the barn-swallow rose to the occasion and assumed his rôle with spirit, not only showing himself social and lively about the house, but blossoming out as a really brilliant singer, capable of furnishing a morning song to enchant the most critical audience. Perching himself on the peak of the roof over a dormer window, and standing up very straight on his tiny black legs, — contrary to the family custom of sitting, —

one would sing his quaint and charming song for half an hour at a time without pause, in so loud a tone that I hardly recognized it at first.

One morning before I was well awake, I heard a great chattering of swallows, so near it seemed they must be in the room. Rousing myself I looked to the window, where appeared a little black head against the screen, constantly turning from side to side, with bright black eyes peering into the room. He was keeping sharp watch over me, while some sort of a conference was in progress on the roof of the piazza before the window. There was no singing, but excited conversational notes in many voices. As long as I made no movement the talk went on, but on my first involuntary stirring the watchman on the sill uttered a cry, and the meeting adjourned without ceremony. What kill-joys we have made ourselves to the birds.

May mornings on the shore of Lake Michigan were opened by the songs of a wren,— a house-wren, in wooing time, and,—

> "Sweet and clear
> His cheerful call came to the ear,
> While light was slowly growing."

The way through which I reached the scene of this interesting window-study was far from charming. There were miles and miles of stumps; whole townships of dead trees, some barked and ghastly white in the sunshine, some blackened by fire, and acres of them lying in piled-up confusion, as the burning of their roots had made them fall. Everywhere was smoke and smouldering fire; everywhere among the stumps were glaring piles of raw new lumber into which the vanished trees had been transformed; everywhere were car-loads of logs, saw-mills, and little new-board towns, looking as if put up overnight. It was pitiful.

Beyond the smoke and depression of these scenes I found a quiet nook near the shore of the lake, and a room with windows looking into a retired yard with trees and shrubs.

The first morning in the new quarters I was awakened by the cheerful song of the wren, and greeted my charming neighbor with enthusiasm, for no bird shows more character and individuality than the dull-clad midget we call a wren. He may always be depended upon for originality, for unexpect-

edness, and idiosyncrasies of many sorts. He never fails to make an interesting study.

Never did a personage of his inches pour out such floods of rapture. It was luxury to lie and listen to the gushing, liquid melody that floated into the window at my head.

I knew it was courtship-time, and wren love-making is not of the common hackneyed sort. It is the unique custom of that family to select and furnish a home, and then win a bride by song, calling her out of the universe by his charm of voice. Surely no more winsome strains could be demanded by the most exacting of little brown wren-maidens.

Knowing this custom, I was always on hand with his first note, sharing his watch, and eager to welcome the unknown — unknown to me — who was to respond to his eloquent appeals.

Sometimes I slipped quietly out of the sleep-bound house to enjoy the mystic charm of those hours when all the world is in dreamland. It is a strange, almost a weird feeling to have the whole green world to oneself, with only birds for neighbors. But by experience only can one understand the rapture

of those hours when one can say with Whittier, —

> "Life's burdens fall; its discords cease;
> I lapse into the glad release
> Of Nature's own exceeding peace."

I found that my little lover had taken a house in the top of a gate-post a few feet from my window, and was extremely busy putting in the furnishings for the expected bride. Never was eager bridegroom so blithe and so busy, and never, I 'm sure, was one so bewitching.

Hours every day I watched him. In the intervals of his labors at nest-making, he sang from the top of the post, — the roof of his house, — often with mouth loaded with building material, so full of rapture it fairly bubbled over. Then, his strain finished, he whisked over the edge with his load.

For three days he never tired, singing an hour or more at a time, ever looking eagerly about overhead, turning this way and that, as if fearing she might pass and he not see her. After that he began to seem exhausted, and his voice not quite so clear and ringing as at first, while he stood with tail drooped to the

post, and looking somewhat anxious. I feared the sweet little drama would end in disappointment and tragedy, and I became as anxious as he for a settlement of his matrimonial affairs.

At last! at last! My bonny bridegroom appeared one morning, fluttering and frisking and singing to split his throat, while conducting a stranger to the gate-post domicile.

At first she alighted on the fence not far off, and he proceeded to coax her, uttering a low "chur-r-r-r," with a soft, coaxing note now and then, keeping his eye on her, apparently begging her to try the home he had provided. In a moment she flew, and he followed, singing almost incessantly. Plainly matters were not settled — she did not quite know her own mind.

The coy damsel flitted about, on a tree, on the fence, on the ground, and he never intermitted his attentions nor his song. Twice he coaxed her almost to the door, but at the last moment she would not. Evidently entering the offered quarters constitutes acceptance in Bird-land.

Many times that day these scenes were

enacted, and I became as absorbed in his courtship as I ever do in the varying fortunes of similar character in human life, or in a novel. Nor is the difference so great as one might imagine — birds are wonderfully human in their ways.

It was noon of the next day before the bride was won and concluded to enter the apartment offered her. Then my little hero went wild with joy, singing like mad, fluttering his wings, flying up in the air. He seemed hardly able to contain himself. Then, too, he instantly began vigorously dressing his plumage, for birds are careful or indifferent to their personal appearance according to their emotions, exactly as are their human brothers.

After this came a difference in the wren's behavior. He was now the sedate head of a family. He still sang, but not so loud or so urgently as before, — his audience was near at hand; wooing was ended and home-life had begun.

And now I made the acquaintance of the bride, who soon began to appear on the gate-post in the rôle of mistress. Though their

dress was the same, I had no difficulty in distinguishing the pair. She was all airs and flirty ways, posturing, flitting about with tail held up at an angle (though never, as usually pictured, pointing toward the head).

The bridegroom appeared somewhat subdued, and I began to fear that life was not all roses to the poor little fellow. She was, it must be admitted, a little coquettish, and made my gentleman keep his distance, greeting him with a sharp note if he came too near, and sometimes pretending to fly at him, upon which he quietly retired a few inches, still evidently regarding her with admiration and devotion.

Once I saw her bathe. There had been a quiet rain without wind, and every leaf was loaded with water. She flew from her nest to a fruit-tree, rubbed against a bunch of leaves, and then fluttered and shook herself violently. This she repeated until wet as she desired, when she gave herself up to an elaborate dressing and arranging of her draperies.

I could not stay to see this charming pair through their honeymoon, nor — what was more important — to protect the little home

so dangerously exposed to every one that passed, but I confided them to a sympathetic household, and left them with the fervent hope that all went well, and that wren-song will make joyous many more mornings beside the blue waters.

IN "THE SNUGGERY"

ONLY keen salt sea-odors filled the air :
Sea-sounds, sea-odors, — these were all my world, —
Strange inarticulate sorrows of the sea.

ALDRICH.

XIV

IN "THE SNUGGERY"

A YEAR or two later than the events recorded in the preceding chapters a nook on the opposite side of the Beloved Island was opened to me. A new cottage was put up — I had almost said grew, so much a part of its surroundings did it seem; so naturally did it appear to nestle in among the trees without displacing anything.

The house was original in plan — if it had a plan — and unique in construction. Its six rooms possessed each an outside door, so that its three tenants, with their two rooms apiece, could come and go at pleasure, without disturbing either of the others. The vagaries of doors and windows were endless. One of my outside doors swung out into the universe, two of my windows lay on their side and opened like doors, one inward, the other outward, and the third window, of one sheet of plate glass, was permanently fastened shut.

It was a regular "sleepy hollow" of a place that summer. We went to bed when it grew too dark to see the ocean and sitting on the piazza ceased to be interesting, and we did not stir — to take up the burden of life — till the sun was far on his daily rounds. We trained the morning callers — grocers and their ilk — not to come to us on their early rounds, and sometimes not a sign of life was to be seen or heard about our "enchanted castle" before a very late hour indeed. If one of the trio did bestir herself earlier, she respected the quiet of her housemates, and having her own private exit, and making her own morning coffee in her own room, had no need to interfere with any one.

It was not always sleep that held us inactive. Never before in our busy lives — I speak for one of the three — had we been able to rest in the morning with no breakfast-call, postman, door-bell, or even reproachful looks to drag us up before the "spirit moved." It was not laziness — it was re-creative rest.

"Yes, I know," said an islander making a piazza-call one day, ostensibly to inquire about some work, but probably to see for

himself what manner of creatures they were who had such eccentric ways. "Yes, I know; you come here for rest; everybody in the 'Row' comes here for rest." He struggled to be polite, but he could n't keep the sneer out of his voice. He himself always got up at four o'clock — he went on, in the slow drawling way in which an island fisherman comes to talk. He should feel that he had wasted half the morning if he lay till eight o'clock.

"The Snuggery" seemed the obvious name for this cozy little home of independence and rest, and that it was always to me, though it had a far more pretentious title.

The views from my two doors — open all the time, weather permitting — had each its own charm. One looked into the heart of the spruce woods, the other offered a stretch of sea and sky framed in by two tall spruces. I could look at either by a turn of the head, but the woods with the woods-dwellers was most attractive. My chair was nearest that door, and when either picture must be shut out, it was the sea which was sacrificed.

The trees of this green paradise were of Nature's inimitable grouping, in appearance

careless yet perfect, and they varied in height from one foot to perhaps fifty feet, all exquisitely fresh and green from the ground to their pointed tops.

Running back into the clump was a glade-like opening, which might have been — but was not — a path. In the centre of that space had planted itself the least of its race, an infant spruce a foot high, the darling of the group, standing up as pert as any patriarch of them all, spreading its tiny arms with the true spruce spirit to have elbow-room for itself, its fresh green twigs still wearing their droll yellow caps.

This beautiful solitude was sacred to wings, for no path was open to feet. Into and over it came about thirty species of birds; yellow warblers and redstarts flashed across its sombre depths like gems, a black-throated green warbler, weighted, it might almost seem, by his name, drawled out his drowsy song, and very wide-awake flickers contributed their various and peculiar cries. Barn- and tree-swallows flew over with lively chat, the olive-sided flycatcher shouted his plaintive "see-here!" an hour at a time, chipping-spar-

rows came about the door for crumbs, and the Coast of Maine bird — the song-sparrow — sang all day. So versatile, indeed, was this dear little gray-coated brother that one hardly needed other singers. In a few hours' study that I gave to him, I recorded twenty-six distinctly different songs, and I have no doubt he was capable of as many more.

To this grove came also an eccentric purple finch. After executing the ordinary song he would pause an instant and then add two notes slurred together, almost exactly like what is called the "pewee-song" of the chickadee. It was quaint, rather slow in delivery, and decidedly unique.

In this retreat I heard also strange flicker noises. I am coming to believe that the woodpeckers, especially the flicker and the sapsucker, are capable of the most peculiar bird-sounds. I am sure we do not know half their vocabulary. It is only when, as in this place, there are few birds that one can trace these vagaries to their source.

I did not appreciate the particular attractions of this small paradise until well into July, when the "rising generation" began to

make itself obvious. Then I discovered, to my delight, that I had happened upon what seemed to be the private nursery of the tribes of the air. From morning till night the air was full of the low, tender notes of bird parents, and the various calls and cries of clamorous younglings. Many of them I did not recognize until a sudden lapse into an ordinary note revealed the author. Not always, alas! could I discover who uttered the sounds that puzzled me, for at the slightest movement every one quickly slipped behind his green curtain and was silent. I recognized the yearning whispers of the flicker baby, the sharp, insistent note of the song-sparrow, the emphatic demand of the young robin, even the comical "ma-a-a" of the infant crow on the outskirts. Most interesting of all were the notes of the olive-sided fly-catcher. His ordinary "tu! tu! tu!" prolonged into a quavering, gurgling sort of tremolo in very low tone, something like the "purring" of a screech-owl. It was an indescribable, but delicious little sound. Sometimes it was given independently of the "tu! tu!" but was always accompanied by this well-known call.

As the olive-sided youngsters who visited my grove progressed, I saw one day an interesting scene between an old and a young bird. It appeared to be a lesson in taking food on the wing. The elder bird came flying around the tops of the trees calling "tu! tu!" with the strange quavering addition I have tried to describe. Instantly another rose from a tree, uttering a similar cry, and flew directly to the first one with mouth open, plainly expecting food. The elder, as it seemed he must be, held himself bent over in a strange stooping attitude, as if reaching down to the young one, while the latter was almost perpendicular, with open beak held up. The two beaks were not far apart and both birds were calling. In this relative position they passed beyond the trees. There could be no doubt that it was an old and a young bird, the former with food which the latter desired, and if it were not an attempt to teach the youngster to take food on the wing, flycatcher fashion, what was it?

Another thing that puzzled me was the conduct of a yellow warbler who seemed to have assumed the manners of a humming-

bird. I first saw him hovering along the edge of a cottage roof, I thought perhaps seeking small spiders, as a humming-bird will hover before an old fence or even a rock for the same purpose. Later, however, I saw him hovering before the tips of the spruce-twigs, and even the tall weeds. Then I bethought me that there is little fresh water on this Island accessible to birds, and none near this grove. Whenever I saw this performance it had been raining, and the conclusion seemed to be obvious that it was water he sought.

A sort of soft baby-talk about the trees had interested and baffled me for days, until one evening I was sitting quietly on the piazza, when suddenly I saw two tree-swallows flying around and uttering the very sound I was trying to locate. One alighted near the top of a spruce-tree and was fed, which proclaimed him a youngster, and after two or three feedings he was left alone. There he sat a long, long time, with a patience and repose remarkable in one of the restless swallow family. He might have been a wooden bird, and I began to suspect he was left there for the night. Meanwhile it grew

darker, and a heavy fog came in from the sea, so that I could hardly see him, but I kept my glass on him for nearly an hour, and my arms ached well before a bird suddenly flew rapidly close past him without a sound or a touch, and instantly the young one followed.

All through the day I sat by my open door watching the little drama of bird-life till late afternoon, when I usually went to my rose-garden to replenish my bowl for the morrow.

This garden of delights was at some distance from The Snuggery. It was a tangle of bushes from two to three feet high and perhaps twenty feet in extent, which was loaded through the season with buds and blossoms of the wild rose in all stages. It was bewildering to look at. What can be more perfect than a wild rose from the time the pink petals begin to show between the green bands that restrain them till wide open to the sun!

I look at them in despair — the sight is almost painfully lovely — hundreds of them open invitingly, each flower more exquisite

than the other. I long to fill my arms, especially as the garden is situated where few people ever see it. I can't bear to pick them — I can't bear to leave them to waste their loveliness on the desert air. At last, in desperation, I gather my usual handful of buds ready to bloom, and the next morning I have a glorious bowl of open and half-open roses, sweet and fresh as if just created — as indeed, are they not?

One of the interesting evolutions of that unconventional household was a salt-water bath-tub. Except in a few pretentious cottages on the Beloved Island the bath-tub is a memory and a hope, and the salt-water tub beyond even dreams. One of our trio longed for sea-bathing, but the sea at that point extends the coolest of invitations to the bather, and after a few shivery trials she gave it up, till she noticed in the rocky coast near the cottage a depression that was filled with every tide, and at low tide was out of the reach of the waves. A happy thought came to her, and henceforth on sunny days when the sea had filled it and retired, she betook herself to her rocky tub, which the warm

rocks had made of just the right temperature. Warm salt-water baths must therefore be added to the comforts of The Snuggery.

Generally — as the shore at that time was not much frequented — the bather enjoyed her bath in solitude; but occasionally a stray wanderer would to his consternation discover a figure lying passively in the rocky pool, and be uncertain whether it was his duty to rush to the rescue.

One thing more I learned on this rocky shore — it is possible to be too near the sea for comfort. It is so big, so overpowering, so irresistible, that it is depressing. It is better to be where one can walk a little way to enjoy it every day, but not have it thrust upon one in all its oppressiveness every hour of day and night. Especially is this true where, as at The Snuggery, it comes full force against the "stern and rock-bound coast" of Maine.

An imperative call from below brought the rest and peace of The Snuggery to a sudden end near the last of August.

IN A LOG CAMP

SLIPPED off their duties leagues behind :

. . . .

No door-bell heralded a visitor,
No courier waits, no letter came or went,
Nothing was ploughed or reaped or bought or sold.

EMERSON.

XV

IN A LOG CAMP

The last chapter of this Chronicle of Summers in Maine dates from a Log Camp in the heart of the far northern woods of the Pine-Tree State.

A log camp, with a famous guide for host, a place apparently sacred to the pastimes of men, seems a strange place for the lover of birds and peace, but attractions there were for her also — deep woods, unconventionality, almost sole possession, and birds — birds — birds. Moreover, fishermen are quiet folk and guns are barred — by law — till after birds and bird-students are gone.

So it came about that one morning about the middle of May I found myself on the platform of a certain station, somewhat dismayed, it must be confessed, by the fact that the station and a tiny cottage beside it were apparently the only buildings that relieved

the monotony of the unbroken forest. My host, however, who was there to meet me, quickly led the way through an obscure and rough path which brought us in a few minutes to the beautiful lake and beside it the Log Camp.

This was a sort of building new to me, made of upright logs with the bark removed. Inside I found the attractive mistress of the house, a fine large living-room with a rousing fire in the wide chimney, and sundry other rooms beside and above it, and all nicely furnished and arranged for living, for — as my guide said — the day of beds of boughs, cooking out of doors, sitting on logs, etc., was past, even for a so-called camp. There was no lack of comfortable beds and chairs, in fact, the name seems to be the only thing that clings to this unconventional retreat in the woods.

The partitions of the camp were of logs like the outside, bare of plastering, and the floors were simply thick boards, so a loud word spoken within the walls was audible in every part. One could n't quite hear a neighbor change his mind, but almost every-

thing short of that. Moreover, in the years since the logs were placed they had parted company in places, and not only might one be illuminated by the lamp in the next room, but refreshed by the breezes from the great out-of-doors.

My neighbors in the log camp were few but interesting to study, for they were to me a new species — sportsmen. One of their idiosyncrasies that amused and entertained me was the magical transformation that a change of clothes effected.

At this time, it must be remembered, the guests were fishermen, who came singly or in small parties to try their luck in the lovely lake before the door. A well-dressed, respectable looking citizen would arrive at the camp, go to his room with his hand-baggage, and presently would emerge a rough fellow, full of fun and life, jolly as a boy, bearing rods and lines and all paraphernalia for fishing. He was another person; he appeared not more than ten years old, though his gray hairs and world-battered face proclaimed the passage over his head of five times those years. He had shaken off his years with his

city clothes, proving the truth of Mrs. Whitney's verse: —

> "Under gray hairs and furrowed brow,
> And wrinkled look that life puts on,
> Each as he wears it comes to know
> How the child hides and is not gone."

Now he comes out a boy dressed in disreputable clothes and battered hat, with manners to suit. He sings, he shouts, he strides about, and his talk is fishy to a degree, — hooks, rods, flies, reels, and so on and on and on, *ad infinitum.* All this is kept up with enthusiasm, varied by daily excursions and fabulous fish-stories, till nearly time to take the train for home, when the transformation act is reversed, and there emerges a well-dressed, conventional city man again.

What mattered the little idiosyncrasies of the camp and the camp visitors, when we had the woods — the grand wild woods of Maine! Not the spruce thickets of the Beloved Island on the Coast, but trees of great variety, reaching far up against the blue, "where sky and leafage intertwine," — white birch with its kid-finish trunk, yellow birch

fringed like an Indian warrior, sombre-hued cedar, with maple, pine, and occasional self-centred spruce, — one and all in the varied tender green of spring.

It was a joy and delight to sit on the piazza and, aided by the glass, to look far in among the trees rejoicing in their fresh life and vigor; but when the student rashly tried to penetrate this promised land, to seek out its shy inhabitants, trouble began. This was Nature's own undisputed territory, and she had shown what she could do in the way of a tangle to keep intruders out of the secret places provided for the comfort and safety of her wild creatures — her beasts and birds. It must be admitted that when Nature sets out to place barriers to our encroachments, she generally accomplishes her aim. These woods were a striking example of her ability.

Placed, to begin with, on rocks of varying height standing at all angles, with pitholes between cunningly hidden by moss (her favorite method in Maine), then filled in with undergrowth of many sorts, half-decayed stumps, and fallen trees, inviting to the

foot, but treacherously turning over or collapsing on being touched, with a layer over all of dead branches, thus providing impenetrable retreats for the shy porcupine and the wary fox, and delightful thickets for the birds, but a woe and a weariness to the human invader.

In some places where the needs of the few human dwellers (there were six permanent residents) had made a so-called path, there was a particularly dangerous trap for the unwary. The earth being worn away by their feet, left uncovered sundry tough small roots, the size and strength of whipcord, which, being held at both ends, made a snare, in which to catch a careless foot was to fall headlong, lucky, indeed, to escape serious hurt. Such was the stern reality of the picture so inviting from the piazza, and after a few disastrous attempts to penetrate the jungle so tantalizingly spread out before me, I was fain to content myself with what I could see from the outside.

There were no houses, I said, except the three mentioned, but soon was revealed to me a fourth, more interesting than all the

rest. It was the home of a pair of woodpeckers, said my host, whose loud peculiar cries at once proclaimed them the yellow-breasted woodpecker or sapsucker. Theirs was an inconspicuous establishment in the edge of the woods, in the dead stub of a white birch twelve or fifteen feet high, which hung over the water.

The birds had selected the situation when all was quiet around, and great must have been their surprise and dismay when the camp began to turn out its noisy people, and the boat-house delivered up its contents of canoes and boats. Then the silent path beside them became a highway, logs were drawn up out of the lake with great crashing and shouting to horses, and men began to build a wharf directly before their door. Their stub, indeed, was in the way of this work, and it would have been cut down but for the kindness of my host, who would not have it disturbed while the birds were using it.

At first, before all this confusion, the birds announced their coming and going with their usual loud nasal call, one of the most remark-

able of bird-cries; but so much company in the neighborhood soon reduced them to silence. They came and went without a sound until the young appeared, when the mother could not restrain an exultant "pip," as she flew away from her nursery.

Very early in our acquaintance I strayed down to call upon the sapsuckers — rather, I struggled down over a short section of corduroy road, around rocks and stumps, and crossing a gully on logs and unstable bits of timber, at the imminent risk of a tumble. As soon as I reached the old stub the woodpecker himself came out of the door, alighted on the side near me, and saluted me with an imperative note, jerking his body excitedly, as if asking my business, or protesting against my impertinent presence. He was a splendid specimen in immaculate black and white, with flaming crest and throat-patch, above a shining black breast-plate, looking far too dressy for his modest gray dwelling.

It was well I took careful note of him, for that was his last appearance, in my sight, for days. I had watched him with my glass from the piazza, and I knew it was his habit

to take his turn with his mate at sitting, but after that day he appeared no more at the nest. Was the shock of my visit too much for his philosophy?

The woodpecker did not abandon the neighborhood, however. Every day he — or his double — came early to the camp, knocking politely on the roof, making a great noise, but declining our earnest invitation to "Come in!"

The entrance to this interesting little home was on the water-side of the stump, and Nature had apparently provided a beautiful porch roof for them. It was a soft gray-white fungus, just the right size and shape and in the proper position. It would have kept out the rain finely, and I wondered the birds did not open their doorway under it. Their entrance, on the contrary, was over it, and almost at the top of the old trunk.

All through the day I watched the woodpecker family, but the evening, when they had become quiet, I devoted to the singers. It was an interesting bird neighborhood, almost entirely of woods-dwellers, of course. One pair of robins had strayed in there,

attracted by the camp, perhaps, but they were unusually meek for robins, and did not pretend to own the country.

Besides the robins were few birds that we are accustomed to see about houses. No orioles, catbirds, or cedar-birds; no king-birds or phœbes; no goldfinches or song-sparrows. Chebec was there. He was quite "pretty behaved" (in the language of the locality) when he first came, but a few days later, when he began to feel at home and found no one to disturb him, he grew "bumptious" and put on airs of owning the whole place, scolding me, attacking the redstart, and squabbling with his kin. A purple finch came about occasionally with his sweet song; a vireo serenaded us daily with tireless "ee-ay! kee-ter! kee-ter! kee-ter!" an oven-bird made the woods ring from morning till night; the long-necked, ungainly pileated woodpecker sometimes announced himself with resounding whacks, and the laugh of the flicker was heard through the woods.

The joy of twilight was the thrushes! Three of the family were at home in these

sweet solitudes and made the evening glorious with their songs. The rapturous hermit far off, the conversational olive-back a little nearer, and the thrilling veery nearest and dearest of all. Long into the dark I sat on the piazza and listened to the chants of these birds till almost nine o'clock, when all songs were hushed and I went in to enjoy the big roaring fire and the guide's stories.

These stories were often very droll and always unique to me. Such, for example, as of the man who came to the camp in city rig with a gun so long that he could n't turn around, but had to back out of the woods; and of an excited fish who sprang out of the water and knocked the fisherman clean over into his own element, where it is to be presumed he gave him tit for tat.

I was especially interested in the bear stories, which show the peaceable, quiet-loving nature of this bugaboo of childhood. Bruin, it seems, has a wholesome distrust of man, and will always give him a wide berth when possible. If he is cornered and attacked he is able, of course, to defend himself and call out all the wit and the weapons

of men. On one occasion, mine host related, — and this he vouched for, — a gang of men were cutting down trees, and in the fall of one it brought down a decayed neighbor, turning up the dead roots to the sun. Under that tree, it seemed, was the den of a bear, and when rudely disturbed by the tearing the roof from over his head, he very naturally roused himself and came out to see what was the matter. The guide was the first one to see him, and in his consternation at being faced by a big bear, with no gun at hand, he uttered a loud cry, started back, and fell flat in the snow. Surprised at his greeting, the bear turned to go the other way and met two men, who also cried out in terror and ran. The patient beast turned still another way, and lo, the fourth man added his voice and his flight to the others, when the guide — by this time recovered — called to them all to come back, for the bear was more scared than they were. Which, by the way, I did not regard as fair to the peace-loving animal. He was simply trying to get away from the screaming crowd. But men are never fair to their humble relatives. Because

the bear is not aggressive, and asks only to be let alone, he is usually, and so far as I can judge from the stories, unjustly, dubbed "cowardly."

A day or two after I had seen the gayly clad sapsucker beside his door, I noticed that, although there were still two birds taking turns at the sitting, he was not one of them. This aroused my interest to see who had assumed his abandoned labors in the nursery, and I paid closer attention. The two birds changed places simultaneously; that is, one did not leave the nest until the other was ready to go in, — it was not left alone a minute. When the incoming bird reached the old trunk, she alighted on a bit of broken-off branch on one side. In a moment the bird within flew out of the door, and the new-comer went in. I could always plainly see the latter because of this pause, but the outgoing one went so swiftly I could not see clearly.

I soon decided that the incomer was always a female, or, at least, always had a white throat. Were there, then, two females attending to the business? Was my beautiful

sapsucker a Mormon? or had he called in an unattached neighbor to take his place?

This was a mystery, and closer study deepened it. On several occasions in the little flurry of arrival and departure I saw both the sitters together, and then I saw that while both of them had the white throat and breast, one had a narrow stripe of red on the head, and the other had an entirely black crown.

Nor was this the only sapsucker problem. Several times there came around the house a fourth member of the family who had a heavy black breast, but no red on throat or crown. This was my dilemma: the perfect-plumaged male with black breast-plate and full crown and throat of red belonged to the nest, for I saw him go in and out many times.

Who, then, was the bird with narrow red stripe on the head and the white throat of a female, so devoted to the nest?

If the red-striped bird was the mate of the perfect male, who was the black-crowned one? Was one of the two a friendly neighbor? In a word, which was which, and who was the other?

Moreover, who was the nondescript with the black breast of masculinity and the white throat and undecorated head of feminine woodpeckerdom?

Are such eccentricities of costume common in the sapsucker family?

None of these problems could I solve, though I watched hours every day, when watching was a warfare for the insect pests which abounded.

After a while, when the young were hatched and both white-breasted birds were feeding, the brilliant male came about again, climbing the trees in the way that always suggests the beanstalk hero of the nursery, "hitchity-hatchet and up I go," sliding down and waltzing around the trunk with a freedom and ease to make one wonder; then bringing his prey to a stump and beating and worrying it awhile before eating, calling his loud cry, and making himself obvious in every way, but never once approaching the nest.

I shall never know the truth of the domestic arrangements of that home in the old stump, for a little later events put an abrupt end to my study.

When I found that the young were out, I kept close watch of the feeding. The mother — or must I say mothers? — brought worms so big that I could see them. They were not dug out from under the bark, but picked off, and if the trees around were not stripped of worms it was not for lack of diligence on their part. Remembering this bird's reputation as a sapsucker, I looked carefully for punctures in the bark of the maple-trees in the vicinity, but I looked in vain.

I have spoken of the torments that made out-of-door study heroic, — black flies, which I never encountered before, and the familiar torture of the mosquito. They came together, they came in hosts, and they came every hour of the day, — one singing around the face in a way to drive one wild, the other silent but inflexible of purpose, persistent in effort, and never failing to get in its maddening work.

Then I learned the value of a camp "smudge." The word has a repelling sound, and the idea is not agreeable, but the relief is rapture, and I learned — what surprised me — that one can be happy and listen en-

thralled to bird-song while enveloped in a cloud of smoke.

"Making a smudge is a lost art," said my host; but I could not agree with him, for he made a grand one, such as required a Maine guide of years' experience to produce, one that would throw out its protecting clouds two or three hours without renewal. Some mysterious combination in a deep tin pail, brightly burning, then smothered by a mass of green leaves and fern — ferns, alas! holding most tenaciously to life, and therefore making the most lasting smudge.

The woodpeckers were not the only interesting residents of the woods, nor the thrushes the only singers. The scarlet tanager sometimes favored us with a sight of his brilliant livery and the sound of his halting, somewhat hoarse song; purple finches visited us with their sweet warbling strains; and a winter wren — bless him! — came frequently with his witching notes.

The wren had a nest — I suppose it was he, for I heard no other of his kind — on an upright beam against a house or "camp" a little farther up the lake. It was like the

other nests of this bird I have seen, round as a ball, with entrance on the side, and in the fullness of time the nestlings made their exit exactly as I have seen these minute birdlings do before. A friendly visitor went close and peeped into the doorway to see if they had gone, when instantly there was a scramble and a rush, and five baby-wrens took flight in as many directions. The visitor was startled and dismayed at the mischief she had wrought, but I comforted her with the assurance that as they all flew well, they were no doubt ready, and perhaps even waiting, for some such incentive to bestir themselves.

Living in the woods away from society had apparently developed some eccentricities among the birds, or else they were so full of joy in their paradise that it must show itself in peculiar ways. The purple finch, for example, after ending his usual song, added many repetitions of one note, sometimes changing it to a run of a few notes down the musical scale. It sounded a little like the robin's "laugh," and was a very pleasing conclusion, for this bird's song always seems

to me unfinished and to need a few concluding notes. A vireo, the one who called all day about the house "ee-ay," following it with what sounded like "kee-ter! kee-ter! kee-ter!" occasionally concluded this standard utterance with a short strain of a song entirely different from any vireo-notes I ever heard. An oven-bird, whose conventional song, "teacher! teacher! teacher!" was heard all day, now and then varied the monotony by running on into half a dozen notes of quite another character, as if he had half a mind to add his flight-song.

I do not wish to imply that a bird has but one song. A greatly mistaken notion which has wide circulation and belief among persons who are not observers is embodied in these verses by Dr. Holland: —

> "The robin repeats his two musical notes,
> The meadow-lark sings his one refrain,
> And steadily over and over again
> The same song swells from a hundred throats.
> Each sings its word or its phrase, and then
> It has nothing further to sing or to say."

So far is this from true, that the individuality of bird-utterances is sufficiently marked to distinguish those of the same spe-

cies from one another. Very rarely, indeed, does a bird repeat exactly the notes of another of his family.

The common robin varies his song indefinitely. I have heard all grades of excellence, as well as varieties of arrangement. One bird I have known on the coast of Maine for two consecutive years, who at a certain part of his song sings what sounds like "id-i-ot! id-i-ot! id-i-ot!" so plainly that he has been named after the writer who also makes that the burden of his song (with apologies to J. K. B.).

More than this; I have on two or three occasions heard a robin evolve a new song, or a new turn in an old one, which appeared to give him great pleasure, for he stood in the spot where it had seemed to strike him, and repeated it many times, omitting all the rest of his song, and after that introducing it into his regular carol. At another time I was electrified one morning by a strange new song, a tender tremolo, and hastening out to see the singer, found a robin who had adapted his so-called "laugh," giving it in a soft, musical tone and much higher key, and thus produc-

ing a really captivating strain. The bird seemed as much surprised as I was, as if he had chanced upon it, and he repeated it for a long time.

The junco, a common bird in New England, whose ordinary utterance is a simple trill, or rapid repetition of one note, like that of the chipping-sparrow, had, in one place where I heard him, a second song, lower in tone and of different quality altogether. And a chipping-sparrow in the same place improved on his song by interrupting the usual monotonous trill with pauses of varying length, which made it far more attractive. The vesper-sparrow has a varied song, and I once heard one who produced a strange double-note effect, the second much lower than the first, and so nearly together that I could hardly believe one bird uttered it. The song-sparrow has a very extensive repertoire, as noted elsewhere. I have heard and seen one bird, perched in plain sight, give eight totally different songs. Among this species, too, is the greatest variety in degrees of excellence. Some are almost equal to our finest songsters, and I never heard two sing alike.

Nor is variety confined to the sparrows — there are the warblers. The black-throated green warbler, an exquisite bird, common in northern New England, whose song is usually represented by the words "trees, trees, beautiful trees," I have already spoken of. Another of these fairy-like warblers, the Maryland yellow-throat, is popularly supposed to have a song of three notes represented by "witches-here," or "o-wee-chee," repeated three times; but I spent one summer beside one who had five syllables in his song, and not one like those quoted above.

Not even the wood-thrush is constant to his score. I once had the happiness of living a few weeks near one of these birds who was an original genius. He had an exceptionally fine voice to begin with, pure and rich, and his inspirational efforts were concentrated upon his one closing note, which he rendered in several different ways impossible to characterize, but all delightful.

Mr. Cheney, who studied this matter critically, and has given us a book of bird-songs carefully reduced to our musical scale, recognizes a vast difference between individuals of

the same species. "I find more and more," he says, "that birds extemporize, and that those of the same species do not sing alike." This must be the experience of every close student.

Another interesting thing about the songs of birds is the fact that they are capable of classification. Nearly all have three, and many of them four kinds of songs, which I have designated as —

First, the common song.

Second, the love-song.

Third, the whisper-song.

Fourth, the flight-song.

The love-song is that which blesses us on the arrival of the birds in spring, in wooing mood. It is ecstatic, and probably the best a bird can do. On several occasions I have known the love-song to be addressed by captive birds to the one in the house on whom they had fixed their affections, but always with a peculiar emphasis of manner, and almost always when alone with the beloved, showing that it was something very special.

To enjoy the love-song one must not only be up early in the morning, but in the field

promptly with the opening of the season. For when the bride is won, the home established, and the singer settled down to entertain his mate, and await the time when the pretty shells shall give up their precious contents, and the nest shall "brim over with the load of downy breasts and throbbing wings," the song becomes the calmly happy utterance I have called the common song. It is at this time that a bird has leisure to vary, change, and elaborate his theme, and it is a most pleasing time to study him.

Sometimes one shall be so happy as to hear what I have called the whisper-song. One must be very near and very silent, for it can be heard only at a distance of a few feet, being delivered with nearly or quite a closed beak, and by no means intended for the public ear. There is a dreamy, rapturous quality in this song which differentiates it from all others. It seems to be addressed neither to the mate, nor to the world at large, but to be simply a soliloquy, an irrepressible bubbling over of his joy of life. And it gives emphatic denial — if one were needed — to the opinion which has been expressed, that a bird

lives in constant terror of his life. No one who has heard that song can believe otherwise than that it comes from a serene and blissful spirit.

The flight-song is still more rare, and different, also. Not all birds are known to indulge in that particular form of expression, but discoveries are constantly being made, and not infrequently another bird is added to the list of those known to have a flight-song.

This utterance on the wing, while differing from the others, — as said, — usually introduces a strain from the common song, or the family call, which readily identifies the singer. The oven-bird, for instance, while pouring out his rhapsody, sailing about over one's head in the dusk of late afternoon, interpolates an occasional "teacher! teacher!" which proclaims him at once. The bewitching little yellow-throat, while delivering himself on wing cannot refrain from a betraying "o-we-chee!" which is equivalent to shouting his name.

While songs differ with individuals, with seasons, with emotions, even with age, there

is still always a certain family quality or manner by which one may recognize the species. Rarely do two robins arrange their simple notes in the same way, yet one never fails to recognize the voice of a robin. It is the same with orioles, thrushes, and all others.

A noteworthy thing about a bird's song is, that he has to learn it, — it does "not come by Nature," as was formerly believed. This has been amply proved, both by hearing the youngsters at their music-lessons, and by the fact that birds reared away from their kind learn the song of whoever happens to be their neighbor. A gentleman in Brooklyn picked up a chewink too young to fly, and reared it in a cage which stood next to a European ortolan. He learned the complete song of his neighbor and sang it always, even after a singing-bird of his own species had been placed beside him to see if he would recognize his native notes.

Another case is of two rose-breasted grosbeaks reared from the nest by a friend in New Hampshire. They sang freely, but never the song of their family, and an English sparrow in the same house sang a robin-song.

An interesting case of a bird making up a song of his own without instruction, is that of a captive catbird reared from the nest in the heart of an old New England town, and never having an opportunity to hear any other bird, and so get any musical hints. He was — and is, for he is alive at this writing — a great pet and very tame, the constant companion of a mother and daughter who spend most of their time in the room with him, and talk to him constantly. Out of his surroundings and his own "inner consciousness" he has evolved a song. It is, of course, in the tone and manner of his race, but it is curiously original, reproducing many of the sounds about him, and even several short sentences of the human language as plainly as any parrot. "Hello, little boy!" and "Hello, sweetheart!" common greetings of his fond mistress, are pronounced perfectly. The true American "Hurry up! Hurry up!" caught from the children on the street, as his cage hung near an open window, and "Baby boy!" are other of his articulate utterances. The interesting thing about all these is, that they form part of his song, and are not

spoken as separate sentences, though he will often repeat one after his mistress.

The catbird is a most interesting and accomplished bird in other respects. He whistles the first line of "Coming through the rye" very completely, and like all birds, he has various other utterances, a complaining "qu! qu!" when he wants his cage moved into another room, a charming whispered chatter in a plaintive tone when his beloved mistress comes close to him and talks to him, which he will keep up as long as she will stay.

In the spring, the season of love-making in the bird-world, he is most sentimental and coaxing in his "talk" and chatter to his two lovers, coming on their shoulders and busying himself with scraps from the waste-basket, as if to hint that nest-making is in order. This bird is so busy and so evidently happy that one is not moved to painful sympathy as in the case of most captives. He has many playthings which he enjoys greatly. Among them a tiny bell to ring and a small china doll, which seems to give him as much pleasure as it does our own little folk. He is out

of his cage a great part of the time, and generally returns to it of his own accord, evidently feeling that it is home.

Even the adult bird can learn a new song. I have known of two cases, one of which I saw and heard myself, of a captive English sparrow learning the song of a canary, and giving it perfectly, with all its trills and quavers.

If, in studying these most fascinating little creatures, we could clear our minds of the old notions of instinct, it would be a help to rational understanding of their lives. Lloyd Morgan has done much by his experiments with birds hatched in incubators, to eradicate the popular belief in blind instinct, but more remains to be done. Here is a fruitful field for some of our active young bird-students to occupy. A field, too, which does not require the killing or even disturbing of parent birds, or stealing their young. For to be conclusive the experiment must begin with the incubator, and the domesticated species are best and most convenient for the purpose.

We laugh at the myths and fables by

which the ancients accounted for curious facts in bird-life, but listen to a sample of the ignorance of our ancestors little more than one hundred years ago. In a serious "Dictionary of Natural History" this account is given of the albatross: —

"When an albatross wishes to sleep it rises into the clouds as high as it can, where, putting its head under one wing and beating the air with the other, it seems to enjoy its ease. After some time, however, the weight of its body only thus half supported brings it down, and it is seen descending with a pretty accelerated motion towards the surface of the deep; on this it again exerts itself to rise, and thus alternately ascends and descends at its ease."

And again, our Cotton Mather gravely announced the discovery in America of the "dove employed by our father Noah," going into particulars, and adding his own conviction that "it is a true discovery."

Should not these statements make us a little modest in our assertions, and suggest to us that not everything is known — *even yet;* and that it does not become us to be

incredulous when a new song or a hitherto unknown habit is discovered? What we know about bird-life bears no comparison to what we do not know, as any thorough student of living birds will testify.

To return to the woodpeckers: the only attempt at a continuous song that I heard from the sapsucker was a droll performance in his always droll tone, a sort of sobbing, retching "yar-rup!" often repeated with indrawn breath, as it seemed. At first I thought it a cry of distress, but as the bird seemed to be enjoying himself, I concluded it was only his quaint way of expressing himself.

Into these delightful days in the log camp came creeping a whisper to chill one's blood. It was that dread word "fire," most fearful of all in the deep woods. Rumors grew and thickened; there was an ungovernable fire a few miles above, clouds of smoke drifted down and obscured the lake, and fine white ashes fell upon us on the piazza. A hundred men had been sent up to fight it, but it was marching with irresistible force at the rate of fifteen miles an hour, it was said, sweeping all before it. One town was already

burned. Then suddenly came the dreaded cry from below us, half a mile off, and every man about the camp seized pail or shovel and hurried away. At night they came back, begrimed, scorched, and half dead with fatigue, and said they had got it so choked off that it would not reach us that night at any rate.

Already the evening fish and bear stories gave place to tales of this one terror of the woods. It was said that birch-trees, of which these woods are full, are veritable incendiaries; that when the bark begins to burn, it curls away from the trunk, comes off in great flakes, and is carried by the wind to other trees, and so spreads the flames. With a strong wind blowing night and day, and the whole state as dry as tinder, this was not cheering news.

The next day new terrors: fire broke out nearer, on the railroad itself, our way out. The ties were blazing, and a train which came up could not pass because of warped rails, and had to go back.

Still I lingered, loath to leave the beautiful spot, and looking and hoping for the

saving rain. All the men about the camp, fishermen and guests included, hurried away to fight the enemy so near. Two of them told me of a little tragedy they witnessed, one of the thousands that doubtless took place, — "a bird commit suicide," as they phrased it. It darted into a bush that was burning, and dropped dead, as they saw. No doubt the nest was there.

At last came the deciding rumor which ended my hesitation, destroyed my last hope, and set me to packing my trunk. The trestlework of an indispensable railroad bridge had taken fire. Crippling that bridge would cut off retreat by rail, and leave us only the doubtful resources of small boats by which to escape.

I hastily collected my belongings, for I put not my faith in small boats, waited till a train came up, and thus proved that the road was open, flagged the first train down, and took a day's ride through burning Maine, in smoke so dense we could not see the landscape, and the sun shone red as blood. The smoke reached out into the ocean, it was said, several hundred miles, and incoming

steamers had to go slowly, as through a fog.

Down to the coast I came, took steamer to the Beloved Island, where, happily, there are few trees to burn, and here at last, where my story begins, it comes to an end, on the enchanting coast of Maine.

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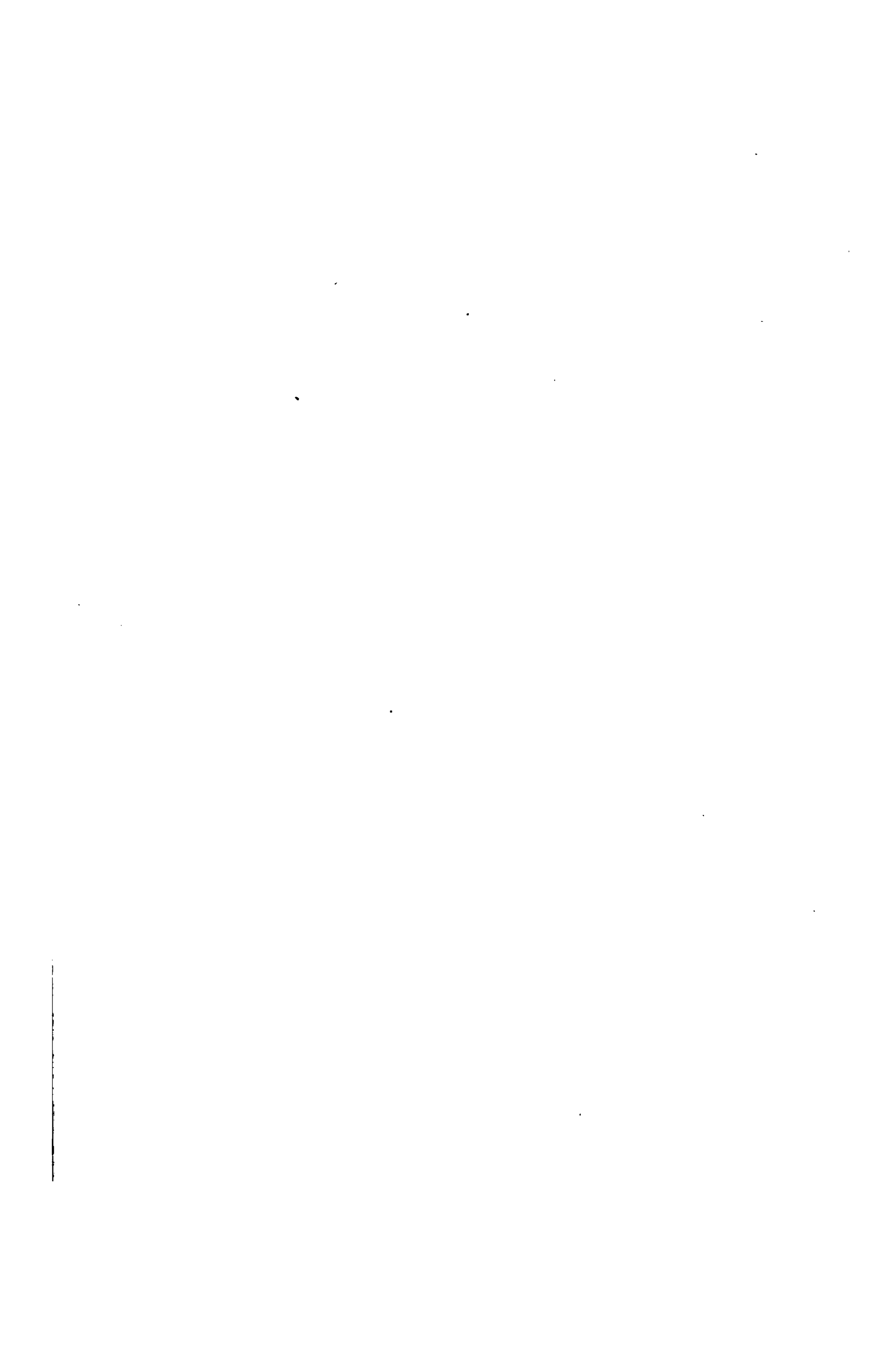

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